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ABSTRACT

The guide provides a brief introduction to the culture and language of Mexico, and is designed for visitors, students, and business travelers. It offers practical information on various aspects of daily living, including: money; food; restaurants; drinks and drinking; hotels; tipping; postal and telecommunications services; transportation; shopping; health and medical care; electricity; measurement and clothing size conversions; greetings and leave-takings; titles and forms of address; conversation topics; friendship; invitations; personal space and privacy; time; silence and noise; equality; belonging to a group; eating customs and meals; family life; leisure activities; and festivals and celebrations. Suggestions for appropriate behavior and expectations are offered. It also includes basic information about Mexico: a historical sketch; a map; people; land and climate; government; economy; education; religion; and arts. A final chapter addresses use of the Spanish language, and includes a pronunciation guide, basic grammar facts, some useful expressions, and some typically Mexican expressions. A brief bibliography lists additional books about Mexico. (MSE)

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# MEXICO

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Alvino E. Fantini

Beatríz Céspedes de Fantini

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# LIVING IN MEXICO

How to Feel at Home,
Make Friends and Enjoy Everyday Life

Alvino E. Fantini
Beatríz Céspedes de Fantini

PRO LINGUA ASSOCIATES

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# *FOREWORD*

Travelers exploring a new country for the first time will find that a few minutes preparation can make all the difference between a rewarding and enjoyable trip — and disaster.

To the busy traveler, this series of very readable and entertaining guides provides a brief introduction, maps, vital statistics, a little history, and a lot of practical advice that instill a sense of security from the time you arrive at the port of entry.

In the brief time it has taken you to familiarize yourself with this guide and its tables, you are ready to assimilate enough of a new culture to get you moving.

Everything you really need to know — from exchange rates and health tips to local customs and a brief historical overview — is at your fingertips, in a book that fits neatly in your jacket pocket.

If you don't know the territory — or the people — this guide is good company to any stranger in a strange land.

Patrick J. Leahy
U.S. Senator from Vermont
Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Foreign Operations

# *ABOUT THE AUTHORS*

Dr. Alvino E. Fantini and his wife, Beatríz Cépedes de Fantini have been staff members of The Experiment in International Living since the mid 'sixties. The Experiment is one of the oldest and most prestigious intercultural exchange programs in the world. For nearly twenty years the Fantinis ran a Mexican language and cultural orientation program for The Experiment at Oaxtepec, Tlaxcala, Valle de Bravo, and Metepec. This gave them a wonderful opportunity to explore Mexico, make hundreds of close Mexican friends, and follow their interests in athropology, folk dancing, art, and Meso-American indiginous cultures (especially Aztec and Mayan).

When they are not visiting or teaching overseas, the Fantinis live in Vermont where they are on the faculty of The School for International Training — this is the academic branch of World Learning, the parent organization of The U.S. Experiment.

At SIT, Beatríz Fantini directs the Language and Culture Center. Over the years she has also taught Spanish and run a remarkable variety of language and cultural orientation programs both in the U.S.A. and in several Latin American countries. She is a native of Bolivia.

Dr. Alvino Fantini is the director of Bilingual and Multicultural Education for the SIT Master of Arts in Teaching Program. Aside from his native English and Italian, he is fluent in Spanish and Portuguese and familiar with French, Greek, Esperanto, German, and Aymará. His Masters is in Latin American Studies and Anthropology, his Doctorate in Applied Linguistics, both from the University of Texas. For SIT and The Experiment, he has served as a director, teacher, consultant, translator, exchange leader, and materials developer for programs all over the world. Recently he served as president of SIETAR International (The Society for Intercultural Education, Training & Research).

Between them, Dr. and Mrs. Fantini have written over fifty published books and articles on language and culture.

# *INTRODUCTION*

There are lots of guide books on Mexico, wonderful guide books, full of detailed recommendations and information on the cities, resorts, museums, and scenic delights of Mexico, often with beautiful color photographs. This is not one of them. This book is intended to give you a "handle" on Mexican culture. We want to make it easier for you to be comfortable living or visiting in Mexico, to get to know Mexicans as friends and, frankly, to build bridges of understanding between Mexico and your country, whether you come from the United States, Canada, Europe, or some other part of the world.

To start with, we should say that everyone who has worked on this book loves Mexico. It is not, however, a book of colorful, evocative travel writing. It's a book of details. We have put together a lot of specific, really useful information on the Mexican way of life, starting with some things you ought to know to "survive" on your arrival. Then, to give you some perspective, we have also included brief introductions to Mexican history, geography, economics, and culture and a brief explanation of the Spanish language as Mexicans speak it. "Brief" is the key word. There is much, much more we could have shared, but these quick insights should get you started. We ourselves enjoy reading about Mexico and have recommended some wonderful books for you, but we haven't included any vivid descriptions of places and treasures here; we didn't want the practical details to get lost. This is intended to be a brief, down-to-earth, easy-to-use guide. And yet, we trust that our enthusiasm will shine through the details, that our love of Mexico will still be catching.

Why should you try to learn about Mexico? Why not just go about your business as if you were in Dubuque? Why not just take tours to the Mayan temples and Teotihuacan or go sit on the sunny beaches of Isla Mujeres or Mazalán? They are beautiful beaches, so why try to get handle on the culture? It is a fair question. You will find that most Mexicans will be courteous and helpful whether or not you make an effort, so why bother?

The first reason is that you'll have more fun, whether you are in Mexico for business or pleasure. Most of your efforts to speak a little Spanish and to fit in with Mexican customs will be met with enthusiasm and encouragement. Typically, Mexicans will show real appreciation when you show an interest in them and their country. The more effort you make, the more you'll enjoy your stay in Mexico. And, of course, if business is your aim, you will be more successful if you are comfortable. Most Mexicans find it easier to do business with friends who are *simpático*, understanding and trustworthy.

The second reason for getting a handle on Mexico is educational. As you try to understand present and future developments in the world and particularly in North Amerrica, you will need to understand that Mexico is not the dusty, sleepy little country "south of the border" shown in old cowboy movies. It is, rather, a dynamic, modern nation. It has the tenth largest population of any country in the world, by far the largest of any Spanish speaking nation, and it is more than a third the size of the United States. Because of its size and its vigorous economy and the tremendous flow of people, goods, and culture across its long border with the U.S., Mexico cannot be ignored. It is extremely important to the rest of North America. Economically, it is a huge market with even greater potential, and it is a vital source for skilled labor and manufactured goods, as well as agriculture and minerals.

In considering this modern Mexico, it is important to understand that it is both like and unlike its northern neighbors. It is a *mestizo* (mixed) culture with both Spanish and Indian roots. This actually is a similarity to the north, since both Canada and the U.S. are characterized by cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. One might almost say that North America is a *mestizo* continent. Certainly, there are more and more Mexicans and Mexican influences stretching all the way from Vancouver to Maine. But you shouldn't let this and Mexico's deepening participation in North American trade fool you into thinking that it is becoming just a southern extension of the U.S. sunbelt.

Like Canada and the United States, Mexico is a proudly independent nation. All through its modern history, Mexico has insisted on going its own way. It has its own rich and distinctive culture and a view of world affairs and history which is influenced by both its Indian heritage and its close cultural ties with Central and South America and with Spain. As you live in Mexico, you will find much that is comfortably familiar, much that makes you feel at home. But you will also find that this Mexican pride and sense of distinctness permeates all aspects of Mexican life and is very important to understanding how Mexicans see themselves and the world.

May your experiment of living in Mexico be one of the most interesting and enjoyable adventures of your life.

Arthur A. Burrows
Publisher

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# 1. FIRST STEPS

You are about to embark upon an adventure—living in another country. Your destination is Mexico. When you arrive, you will need to be able to satisfy some immediate survival needs. You will probably find that you must do some things differently from how you do them at home. This section is designed to help you get started learning how to live in Mexico. Although every town will be a little different, we can provide you with some basic facts about life in Mexico. Filling in the details will be up to you. So, while we can tell you, for instance, about restaurants and eating habits in Mexico, you will need to find places to eat which have food you like and can afford. And while we can tell you about different types of transportation in Mexico, you will still need to find the best way to get around the town where you live. We can suggest alternatives, but you will be making the final choices.

One final note: You may find that cultural changes, technological advances, and regional differences affect customs, values, systems, and even the "country facts" reported in this booklet. So "expect the unexpected" and be prepared to learn from your direct experience. The information in this section and those which follow should be used only as an initial guide. *¡Buena Suerte!*

This section covers the topics listed below. Read those of most interest to you now; you can read the others as the need arises.


1.1 Money
1.2 Food
1.3 Restaurants
1.4 Drinks and Drinking
1.5 Hotels
1.6 Tipping
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1.8 Letters, Telegrams, and Faxes
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1.11 Health and Medical Care
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## 1.1 Money

The *peso* is the monetary unit used in Mexico. The symbol for it is **$**. The exchange value of the *peso* changes according to the world money market. Since the value of the peso fluctuates, check current exchange rates before you go.

After more than a decade of inflation during which the peso dropped from 12½ *pesos* per U.S. dollar to over 3000, the Mexican government has revalued their currency. The *nuevo peso* (abbreviated as N$) is worth just over three pesos to the U.S. dollar, and although the exchange rate still fluctuates, it has been quite stable since revaluation at about N$ 3.06 per $1 U.S. However, check the official bank exchange rate before changing any significant amount of money.

The *nuevo peso* (N$) is available in 1, 2, 5, 10, and 20 new peso coins and 20, 50, and 100 new peso bills. It is divided into 100 *centavos*, and 5, 10, 20, and 50 *centavo* coins are in use. This is a simple and convenient system. However, the *nuevo peso* is still new, and during the transition period there are still many old peso bills and coins in circulation. This can be confusing, although if you remember to "lop off three zeros" it should not be too bad — a $20,000 old peso bill becomes N$20 (about $6.54 U.S) and a $500 old peso coin becomes 50 *centavos* (about 16 U.S. cents).

Banking hours in Mexico are normally from 9 AM to 1:30 PM, Monday through Friday. However, you can usually change money only until 1 PM. Outside of Mexico City, banks may have special hours for exchanging money and traveler's checks. In the last few years, a variety of exchange houses, *cambios*, have come into being, and it is sometimes easier to change money through such establishments since there are many of them and they have longer hours. Both banks and exchange houses are closed on national holidays.

Traveler's checks are easy to change in large cities at hotels, shops, restaurants, and even in markets. In small towns it may be more difficult to use them. You can also change money at the airport and get a favorable exchange. The exchange rate may be less favorable in shops and restaurants. Your passport or other identification is normally required when changing traveler's checks. Credit cards are accepted in many places and can also be used to get cash from automatic teller machines, when available, as in the U.S. Charges will be made in *pesos* but billed to your account in U.S. dollars at the U.S. bank rate.

## 1.2 Food

Mexican cuisine is among the most exciting in the world. The Indian heritage and Spanish influence have combined to form a fantastic blend of colors and flavors. Don't be surprised if you find the food in Mexico much more varied and interesting than the Mexican food in U.S. restaurants and supermarkets.

In general, Mexican food is based on corn, rice, and beans. The staple of Mexican food is the tortilla, which is like a crepe made traditionally of corn flour. In some parts of Mexico, wheat tortillas are also common. A variety of dishes are based on the tortilla. Depending on how they are prepared (fried, rolled, etc.), the dishes change name. Some of the most popular tortilla-based dishes are: *enchiladas, tostadas, tacos, flautas, chilaquiles, garnachas,* and *sopes*. Often, each region has a different name for the various shapes and contents of the tortilla. Corn flour is also used to make many other things, like *tamales*, which are made of corn dough with some type of stuffing and then wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves.

Next to tortillas, the most common starch in Mexico is rice. Mexicans do enjoy potatoes, pasta, and different kinds of breads and rolls, but rice cooked in a rich soup stock, often with chicken (*arroz con pollo*) or other meats and vegetables, is eaten almost every day.

Mexicans commonly have *frijoles* (beans) in their daily diet. A dish of frijoles is usually served toward the end of the meal. There are a variety of *frijoles* (black, red, white; small, medium, large), each with a different name. They are often served refried (*refritos*). Next to frijoles in importance, and with even more variety, are *chiles* (peppers). There are more than twenty kinds of chiles in Mexico. Some are mild; some are very hot. They are used in the preparation of different dishes, and the amount used varies from region to region. Not all Mexicans like fiery hot food.

Mexican food often uses many special ingredients and sauces. One special sauce is called *mole*. There are several varieties, the most famous being *mole poblano*. This is served only on special occasions since the preparation of the sauce is very elaborate. It is made with different types of chiles, many spices, and a mixture of almonds, peanuts, walnuts, chopped tortillas, tomatoes, and bitter sweet chocolate. It is considered a speciality. Other moles are *pipián* (made with squash seeds called *pepitas*), *cacahuate mole* (made with peanuts), and others made with different types of chiles, vegetables, and spices.

Meat is frequently eaten by the middle or upper-class in Mexico whether in the form of a simple *barbacoa* (barbecue), *carnitas* (shredded meat cooked until it comes apart), or pork in *adobe* (a mixture of *achiote*, a spice, and *chile*). Some special dishes combine various kinds of meats. *Pozole*, a dish originally from the state of Guerrero, is a delicious soup made with hulled corn, pork, chicken, and spare ribs, and then topped with oregano, radishes, shredded lettuce, and ground pepper.

Mexican cuisine boasts many regional specialities. Regional dishes are varied and use local produce and seasonings. In Veracruz and other coastal towns, for example, there is a variety of fish and seafood dishes, like *Huachinango a la veracruzana* (red snapper, Veracruz style), or *ceviche*. The first dish includes fish with a tomato-chile sauce, accompanied with green olives. The second is any kind of fish or seafood raw but marinated and served cold as an appetizer.

Because of Spanish influence, Mexicans are also quite fond of Spanish cuisine. Dishes such as *paella, gazpacho*, and *sopa de mariscos* appear in menus and in homes.

Some dishes that are typically thought of as "Mexican," like *chile con carne, burritos, nachos*, are actually more typical of the southwest of the United States (Texas and New Mexico) rather than of Mexico, and may not even be known in most areas of the country.

## 1.3 Restaurants

Depending on where you are in Mexico, you may find either a great variety of restaurants or just one or two local places. Mexico City has some of the best restaurants in the world. In addition to Mexican restaurants, there are those serving Italian, German, Japanese, Chinese, Swiss, and French cuisines.

The best restaurants are in the *Zona Rosa*, the expensive tourist district of Mexico City. Mexican chain food restaurants are also scattered throughout the city, offering the famous *carnes y quesos al carbón* (charcoaled meat with melted cheese, served with wheat or corn flour tortillas). The best known Mexico City fast food chains are *Los Portales, El Potzocalli*, and *La Parrilla Suiza*. One can eat two tacos or a full *parrillada* (barbecue) accompanied by cold Mexican beer. Usually the menu is posted outside the restaurant, especially in the bigger restaurants. In Mexico you will also find some U.S.-style fast food establishments such as McDonalds, Aunt Jemima's, Burger Boy, VIPs, Denny's, Pizza Hut, etc.

Local restaurants in small towns tend to be family operations. Food is usually prepared for local taste, not for tourists. In some restaurants, you will find what is called *comida corrida* which is the menu of the day offered for a fixed price. Usually it is quite economical and cheaper than ordering a meal *à la carte*.

A 15% value added tax (*Impuesto al Valor Adquirido*), identified by the initials "I.V.A.," is added to the price of meals at the bottom of the bill. Tips are 10-15% of the price of the meal (without the I.V.A.), so an easy way to figure the amount of a tip is to give roughly the same amount as the tax.

Taco stands are found on many street corners in business districts. Like our hot dogs and hamburgers, they can be eaten at any time. Many stands also sell sandwiches and *tortas*. A torta is a sandwich made with a roll and filled with cooked or barbequed meats, ham, cheese, chicken, fritters, avocados, pork, veal cutlets, refried beans, or eggs.

Mexican cuisine does not include many fresh vegetables. Vegetables are used in soups or arranged as garnish. Peppers are probably the most widely consumed vegetable. One specialty dish is *chiles rellenos* (a large green pepper, sometimes fairly hot, stuffed with cheese, dipped in a batter, and fried, then topped with tomato sauce.) During August, *chiles en nogada* are in season, and they are a must. For this dish, chiles are stuffed with a mixture of minced beef and pork, with dried fruits and nuts. They are cooked and served cold, topped with a cream sauce made with ground walnuts and sprinkled with pomegranate seeds. This may be one of the most expensive dishes on the menu.

Aside from these basic foods, there are many specialties that require an educated taste. The famous *maguey* worms, corn fungus (*huitlacoche*), and zucchini flowers (fried, stewed, or in soup) are all specialties which one should try for a real Mexican experience.

## 1.4 Drinks and Drinking

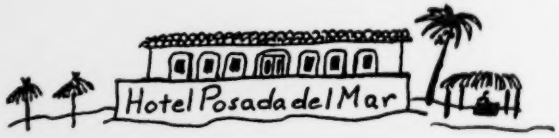
Mexico has many regional drinks, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic. Most non-alcoholic drinks are fruit-based. The famous *licuados* are made from practically any fruit or vegetable. You can find, for example, a *licuado de zanahorias* (carrots) as well as one made with alfalfa. The most popular, however, are those made with fruit such as pineapple, melon, watermelon, peach, strawberries, and the many local fruits, such as papaya, guanabana, zapote, tamarind, guayaba. All can be ordered with milk or water.

In Mexico, drinking the water has always been a "no-no" for both nationals and tourists. In general, tap water is avoided. Drinking water is usually boiled, filtered, or bottled. However, the word "*agua*" is used to define another popular beverage — a watered-down fruit juice. So, you might have an *agua de limón, agua de papaya, agua de sandía* (watermelon), etc., or another regional drink such as *horchata* (a rice drink). Mexicans also drink a lot of colas and other soft drinks.

At parties, family dinners, or visits to restaurants, young people (12+) are allowed to taste whatever is being served: *sangría*, beer, etc. It is normal for young people in Mexico to taste alcoholic beverages, and this is not seen as a problem. Beer is sold in most small stores, supermarkets, and sometimes department stores (*à la* K-mart). Although 18 is the official age limit in Mexico for drinking alcoholic beverages, it is not usually enforced.

Adults enjoy a great variety of excellent Mexican beers, and there are three very traditional alcoholic drinks of Indian origin made from cactuses which are popular. These are mescal from the maguey cactus and pulque and tequila from the agavè cactus or century plant.

## 1.5 Hotels




Depending on where you are in Mexico, you will usually find a variety of hotels of at least two categories: the good and the not-so-good. Hotels are rated by stars. However, in small towns where you find only one or two hotels, this system does not apply. Local people are usually the best informants about hotel quality.

In larger cities, one can also find motels. However, lodgings labeled as motels are not necessarily a nice place to stay. Although some hotels physically resemble an American "motel," they are still called hotels. This, in spite of the fact that you may park very close to your room.

When asking for a hotel room, be sure you request two double beds, two single beds, and so forth. Unlike the United States, a double room does not necessarily have two twin beds. You should also be sure to inquire if there is hot water at all times. In big cities, it is not usual to have specific hours for hot and cold water or to have the water turned off for several hours. In some towns, however, this is routine, especially in the dry season when rain is scarce (October through May).

Most tourist areas in Mexico have an assortment of hotels. Low priced hotels are certainly a bargain. However, for not too much more money, you can often stay in a really nice place without overextending your budget.

## 1.6 Tipping

Tipping customs for restaurants have already been described. However, there are certain other services requiring tipping in Mexico that foreigners might not be aware of. For instance, a gas station attendant gets tipped, as do ushers in theaters, as well as parking lot guards (including those who watch your car when parked at a meter on an open street). Anyone who provides a service gets a tip, and conversely, a customer buying fruit at the open market might get a tip from a vendor in the form of an extra apple, orange, or whatever fruit you might be purchasing.

In levels of high finance, the system of *mordida* (bribe) is fairly common. *Mordida* is a sum of money given to guarantee a business deal, a purchase, or sometimes just a favor. These *mordidas* may amount to thousands of dollars or just a few dollars in a case where you might be stopped by a traffic policeman. *Mordidas* are usually offered in a discrete and diplomatic manner. The government is trying to discourage bribes to law enforcement personnel.

## 1.7 Telephone

There are coin-operated phones in most areas of Mexico, although in Mexico City most public phones are free and don't need coins. In big cities, they can be found on street corners, in shopping centers, restaurants, and other public places. In small towns, they are less common. You may have to search for the *caseta de teléfono* (phone booth or office). In very small towns, there may be only one central phone. To place a long distance call from a small town may not always be quick or easy.

Due to continuing inflation, it is difficult to say how much your call will cost. The airport in Mexico City has some free telephones for passengers, and for anyone needing to make local calls from the airport. The Mexican phone system provides most of the services of phone companies in the U.S. You can place a *llamada por cobrar* (collect call) or *llamada con trajeta de crédito* (credit card call) or, if you are going to reimburse the person whose telephone you are using, you might ask for a *llamada con tiempo y costo* (time and charges). The operators are quite good at making sure you have all the information you request.

The only frustrating part might be to get an operator to answer the phone in the first place. The overseas line is usually busy; however, if you know the area code you can call long distance by direct dialing (known as "LADA"). Again, in some small towns, you might have problems having your credit card accepted by the operator: they may refuse to make your call. The tax for long distance calls may be as high as 40%. Because this tax is so high, it often makes sense to call collect if you are calling abroad. Coin telephones usually work best for local calls, collect calls, or calls to the operator. You cannot call beyond the city limits with a coin-operated telephone.

## 1.8 Letters, Telegrams, and Faxes

Post offices in Mexico are usually open from 8 AM to 6 PM. In large cities, the main post offices do not close at lunch time; in small towns, they often close from 2 PM to 4 PM. Post offices are also open on Saturday until 1 PM.

Some places which sell post cards may also sell stamps, and then you only need to deposit the cards in the nearest mailbox. However, this is not advised since it may take some time before boxes are emptied. If you are near a big hotel, use their mailbox which is much more reliable.

The Mexican postal system is known to be slow even within the country. It is hard to predict when a letter will reach its destination. Letters to the U.S., for example, may take one week to ten days or sometimes longer from small towns. A letter to Europe takes about the same amount of time. It is not advisable to send packages abroad from Mexico. In many cases, they don't reach their destination and there is no way to guarantee their arrival. Telegrams are sent from special telegraph offices often situated near the post office. It is easy to send telegrams, and given the time it takes for a regular letter, many people opt for telegrams. There are also separate offices for sending cables or telex. As they are in the U.S., fax machines are becoming widely available, and faxes are the fastest way of sending a written message. Charges for sending or receiving a fax are usually based on the number of pages and may be more expensive than in the United States.

## 1.9 Transportation

Mexico has two major airlines: *Mexicana* and *Aeroméxico*. They not only fly between major Mexican cities and the U.S. but within Mexico itself. There are also smaller airlines.

The bus system in Mexico provides first, second, and third class intercity travel. There are also luxury tourist buses to major resorts. The higher the class, the cleaner, safer, and more comfortable the buses are. There are four major bus stations in Mexico City—north, east, south and west. Each connects to different cities in different regions of the country. It is a good idea to purchase tickets in advance on first class buses where seats are numbered and reserved. This also avoids standing in long lines in a crowded bus station the day of your trip. Tickets on other buses are normally sold only before boarding.

Mexico City has one of the best subway systems in Latin America. It is not only a very practical means of transportation, but an esthetic experience as well. The stations are modern, often decorated with very artistic designs. The metro goes almost everywhere in the city. Bus stations often connect with the subway, so it is easy to arrive from an interior city to a bus station in the capital and then connect with a subway to the airport. Despite the fact that there are eight subway lines and several more under construction, the cars tend to be overcrowded.

Taxis are inexpensive in Mexico, and in large cities there may be taxis of various types. One type is called a *pesero* or *colectivo*. These travel only along a fixed route and pick up passengers until full. These used to cost a peso, hence their name, but now with inflation, prices have gone up considerably, varying with the distance traveled.

Other taxis may or may not have meters. It is probably best to take only those with meters, since taxi drivers tend to make up rates on a whim, especially for foreigners. If you do take an unmetered taxi, be sure to negotiate the fare **before** you enter. Some taxis show price charts adjusting meter rates. If the meter says 400 pesos, for example, the chart may indicate you now pay 4000. It is sometimes difficult to get change for large bills, so be sure to carry enough small bills and change.

## 1.10 Shopping

Business hours change in Mexico according to the size of the city. In Mexico City, for example, there are stores that do not close at all for lunch. Others that may close from 2 PM to 4 PM will remain open until 9 PM. In small towns, stores normally close from 2 to 4 PM and often you will not find anything open at these times. Even big department stores might close. Offices and some businesses which stay open all day will normally close at 7 PM instead of 9 PM.

In Mexico City, you can find large commercial centers (shopping malls), and sometimes it is better to go to one of these in your area than to brave the traffic complications downtown. Some big department stores contain supermarkets. The tendency nowadays is a one-stop visit to avoid going from place to place. However, there are still various kinds of specialty stores (selling cold cuts, fish, cheese). One of the most common types of shops in Mexico is the *Panadería* or *Panificadora* (a bakery). Since dinner is often a very light meal taken around 7 PM or later, Mexican families often opt for *pan dulce* (a sweet roll) and hot chocolate. Large *panaderías* (bakeries) may have more than 100 varieties of sweet rolls. *Pan dulce* is also served with coffee in the morning, before or after the main part of breakfast (eggs, etc.).

There are many chain stores in Mexico. Some common ones are Gigante, Comercial Mexicana, Blanco, and Aurrerá. These are discount stores, selling anything from cosmetics to food. Many big department store chains have several stores in Mexico City. Among these are:

Liverpool, París-Londres, Suburbia, and Sanborns (which is a source for English language books and periodicals). Most carry clothes and household items. American chains operating in Mexico City are Sears and Woolworth.

## 1.11 Health and Medical Care

Enjoying good health in Mexico requires common sense and a little specialized knowledge. Your frame of mind is important. Prepare yourself to make certain adjustments. Keep in mind that you are not accustomed to the food, water, and mode of life you will encounter, and that you must be moderate and cautious.

New foods should be tried with some precaution until you learn which ones agree with you. Take it easy on hot sauces and highly seasoned foods until you become accustomed to them. You will want to try everything, but let yourself adjust gradually, eating only small portions in the beginning. During this adjustment phase, you'll want to show tact so your Mexican friends will understand that their food, though novel to you, is just as good as the food you eat at home. You must maintain a delicate balance between your good health and the diplomatic aspects of living in a Latin American environment.

Use good judgment. Remember that when you are in doubt about food or drink, as in all matters, it is wisest to "err" on the side of conservatism. Although unwashed, unclean fruit and vegetables can be dangerous as they are in many parts of the world, the food is probably safe in better class Mexican restaurants. When in doubt, stick with peeled and cooked fruits and vegetables. If you are at an altitude higher than that to which you are accustomed (perhaps in Mexico City), you may feel a bit uncomfortable, lethargic and short of breath at first. Move more slowly and avoid extreme exercise. Soon you will adjust to the differences in air pressure and will be able to resume your normal pace. Remember that alcohol has a stronger effect at higher altitudes. The air pollution in Mexico City and other major cities may also affect your health unless you are used to it at home. Again, take it easy.

To avoid fatigue and minor intestinal upsets, take advantage of the siesta when possible. Keep reasonable hours and get plenty of rest. Just in case the change of diet and other factors (chemical content of the water, overtiredness, nervousness, etc.) should cause diarrhea, you will find effective remedies in drug stores. Also drink herbal teas (like

*manzanilla*, or camomile), eat boiled rice, very ripe bananas, and other constipants. Dry toast and plain boiled chicken from which all fat has been removed may be taken for nourishment. If you have a fever or if these treatments are not effective, contact a doctor immediately.

One of the most common problems that tourists to Mexico experience is "soft stool," not to be confused with diarrhea. Soft stool is often caused by the change of diet and increase in fresh fruits, especially mango and papaya, whereas diarrhea may be an indication of an infection or a drastic change of diet.

Tap water is often not safe in Mexico. It is advisable not to drink tap water under any circumstances. Mexicans buy water sold in 10 gallon bottles, and they are careful about not drinking water from the tap. Most homes have purified or boiled, filtered, or bottled water. Mineral water is very common in Mexico. Hotels and restaurants always use bottled water, with or without "gas." However, depending on where you are, when you order a drink, you might want to skip the ice. Also, take care to use bottled water when brushing your teeth and avoid tap water.

The Mexican government provides extensive medical care through the social security system which operates hospitals and clinics all over the country. For those who are members of this system, both medical service as well as medicines are provided free of charge. Naturally, there are also private doctors and hospitals available. However, in many cases, the experiences of the people you are staying or working with may provide the most effective treatments for many problems you may encounter. The Mexican government is also opening 12 bilingual medical centers in major tourist areas. These will operate 24 hours a day and will work in conjunction with several medical centers in the U.S.

## 1.12 Electricity

The current in Mexico is normally 110-115 volts. However, there are a few places where 200-220 voltage is still in use. Three-pronged outlets are not common in Mexico, not even for large machines.

## 1.13 Conversions

Depending on what you are measuring or weighing, systems vary in Mexico. In most cases, the metric system is the common practice but in liquid measurements, the gallon system (fluid ounces) is sometimes used. The following charts are provided to help you make the necessary conversions.

### *Measurements*

#### *Weights and Linear*

| Metric | U.S. |
|---|---|
| 1 gram (g) | 0.035 ounce |
| 454 grams | 1 pound |
| 1 kilogram ("kilo") | 2.2 pounds |
| 1 centimeter (cm) | 0.3937 inch |
| 2.54 centimeters | 1 inch |
| 1 meter (m) | 3.280 feet |
| 1609.3 meters | 1 mile |

#### *Liquid Measure*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 liter (l) | 2.113 pints |
| 1 liter | 1.056 quarts |
| 3.785 liter | 1 gallon |

#### *Dry Measure*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 liter | 0.908 quart |
| 1 dekaliter (10 l) | 1.135 pecks |
| 1 hectoliter (100 l) | 2.837 bushels |

#### *Kitchen Equivalents*

| Metric | U.S. |
|---|---|
| 200 grams | 1 cup sugar |
| 150 g | 1 cup flour |
| 5 g | 1 teaspoon |
| 12 g | 1 tablespoon |

### *Kilometers and Miles*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 km | 0.62 mile | 25 km | 15.5 mile |
| 3 | 1.8 | 35 | 21.7 |
| 5 | 3.1 | 50 | 31.0 |
| 8 | 4.9 | 100 | 62.1 |
| 10 | 6.2 | 200 | 124.2 |
| 15 | 9.3 | 300 | 186.4 |
| 20 | 12.4 | 500 | 310.6 |

### *Thermometer Readings**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 38°C | 100.4°F | 0°C | 32°F |
| 35° | 95° | -5° | 23° |
| 30° | 86° | -10° | 14° |
| 25° | 77° | -15° | 5° |
| 20° | 68° | -17.77° | 0° |
| 10° | 50° | -25° | -13° |
| 5° | 41° | -30° | -22° |

*Mexican thermometers use the centigrade scale. To convert Fahrenheit to centigrade, subtract 32, then multiply by 5 and divide by 9. To convert centigrade to Fahrenheit, multiply by 9, divide by 5 and add 32. For example, 21°C=69.8°F precisely. The chart above gives an approximate conversion.

If you don't have a calculator handy or the time for long-hand calculations, this very rough rule of thumb will give you the approximate Fahrenheit equivalent of centigrade temperatures: the centigrade temperature times two plus 30 equals the approximate Fahrenheit, or C° x 2 + 30 = F° (approx.).

## *Clothing Sizes*

***Skirts, Dresses, Coats:***

| Mexico | U.S. |
|---|---|
| 38 | 10 |
| 40 | 12 |
| 42 | 14 |
| 44 | 16 |
| 46 | 18 |
| 48 | 20 |

***Blouses:***

| Mexico | U.S. |
|---|---|
| 30 | 30 |
| 32 | 32 |
| 34 | 34 |
| 36 | 36 |
| 38 | 38 |
| 40 | 40 |

***Shirts:***

| Mexico | U.S. |
|---|---|
| 36 | 14 |
| 37 | 14½ |
| 38 | 15 |
| 39 | 15½ |
| 40 | 16 |
| 41 | 16 |
| 42 | 16½ |
| 43 | 17 |

***Shoes:***

| Mexico | U.S. |
|---|---|
| 3 | 5 |
| 4 | 6 |
| 5 | 7 |
| 6 | 8 |
| 7 | 9 |
| 8 | 10 |
| 9 | 11 |
| 10 | 12 |

# 2. CUSTOMS AND VALUES

Now that you have a handle on some basic facts about where to find what you need and how to get it, you will want to begin looking more closely at how people live in Mexico. Since Mexicans are to be your new friends and family, it is important to understand their customs and values so that you can fit into their world successfully. The topics covered in this section have been chosen to help you begin your study of Mexican customs and values. Again, it will be up to you to learn the specifics about the people with whom you live and interact. The information we give you here is only a place for you to start. This is a beginning for your cultural exploration; it will be up to you to complete it.

The following topics are covered in this section:


2.1 Greetings and Leave-takings
2.2 Titles
2.3 Conversational Topics
2.4 Friendship
2.5 Invitations
2.6 Personal Space and Privacy
2.7 Time
2.8 Silence
2.9 Equality
2.10 Belonging to a Group
2.11 Eating Customs and Meals
2.12 Family Life
2.13 Leisure
2.14 Holiday Celebrations

## 2.1 Greetings and Leave-takings

Mexicans take a lot of time for greetings and leave-takings. They use several expressions equivalent to "Hi," "How are you?" "What's happening?" (*Hola, Qué tal, Qué hubo, Cómo te va, Cómo vamos,* etc.).

Mexicans will most often shake hands when meeting someone for the first time. Young people, particularly men, continue this tradition, although women also shake hands. Mexicans don't often include names in introductions. Rather, they present the person as "a friend," and it is expected that the friend inject his or her name. It is not a matter of being impolite or being slighted. The most common response when being introduced is "*Mucho gusto,*" to which one answers, "*Mucho gusto,*" or "*Igualmente.*" Young people may use the more informal "*Hola.*"

Leave-taking expressions depend on whether you are going to see the person later or not, and indicate the degree of certainty ranging from "*Hasta luego*" or "*Hasta la vista*" to "*Adiós.*"

## 2.2 Titles

Titles based on social class or status are rare in Mexico. However, titles based on occupation, such as *senador* (senator), *gobernador* (governor), *alcalde* (mayor), or *padre* (priest), are used frequently. "*Doctor*" is often used, not only for a medical doctor, but for lawyers and professors. A commonly used title, and one that carries a lot of weight in Mexico, is "*licenciado(a)*" (university graduate). Calling elderly people *Don* or *Doña* is another way to show respect.

The most widely used titles are those that express marital status. They are *señor (Mr.), señora* (Mrs.), and *señorita* (Miss). There is no equivalent to Ms. in Mexico.

## 2.3 Conversational Topics

Mexicans usually show a great deal of interest in foreign visitors. These visitors may find themselves besieged by questions. Many of these questions may be based on preconceived ideas about foreigners. For example, you might be asked how many TV's are in your home, the assumption being that there is a television in each room. Mexicans are very open. Sometimes people feel that they are overly curious, but they are simply taking a special interest in people.

Most Mexicans are "people" people. They like small talk, and sometimes foreigners get impatient with what they consider to be a lack of depth in their conversations. In a business situation, Americans, for example, are more likely to want to get down to business.

Mexico, is a "polychronic" society, as is most of Latin America. This means that people often speak together at the same time. At the dinner table, for example, everyone may be talking at the same time, with the same intensity and volume! This may take some getting used to. In Mexican culture, everyone has a chance to participate, and nearly everyone does. One Mexican conversational trait is to agree or disagree ostensibly, but not really. You might be told one thing, and then it may seem the Mexicans you are talking to have suddenly changed their opinion. This does not mean that they are hypocritical, but rather it shows they are considerate of those whom they are talking to. They are being diplomatic; they don't wish to offend. To intimate friends, they might say one thing and, to others, something different, perhaps just the opposite of what they've just said.

## 2.4 Friendship

Mexicans are known for being warm, open people. Friendships are very important to them. Mexicans are very loyal people and are always willing to do anything for a friend. Perhaps, in the beginning of a friendship, they are as open as Americans, open on the surface. However, they soon go beyond that, and they can quickly become very involved and remain very close to their friends. They are affectionate and not shy about expressing their feelings towards each other.

Mexicans develop long and true friendships. This is possible because Mexicans have not until recently been a mobile society; they have tended to stay in their home communities for their entire lives, and they still like to be surrounded by those who are close to them.

## 2.5 Invitations

An informal way of extending an invitation in Mexico is by an "open invitation." This is unlike the American "Come and visit anytime," because Mexicans really expect you to drop in. They like to pay impromptu visits to friends and relatives without calling first and making arrangements. A Mexican household is an open place. Children as well as adults visit each other freely. However, this is limited to friends and family; unknown persons are not generally brought into the home.

If you are invited to a dinner or to a party, you are not expected to bring anything. However, as a courtesy, you may take flowers, chocolates, or a small gift. A souvenir from your own city, state, or country would be appreciated and appropriate.

Written invitations don't have to be answered as soon as is customary in the States. If the invitation is to a formal affair, you are expected to respond by the requested date. Most dance parties are by open invitation and are quite casual. A dance party might be scheduled to start at 9 PM, but people are not expected to arrive before 10 PM or later. Mexicans are also very informal about allowing people to bring friends. Usually in small towns, everyone knows everyone else. Bringing friends is customary. There is never a question of limiting numbers in terms of sex, age, etc.

When a Mexican suggests going out, he or she expects to pay, even if the group is of the same gender. This differs from American custom where the person making the suggestion is not expected to pay for everyone else. Because you are a foreigner, they may feel obligated to pay for you. Young people often tease Americans, alluding to the fact that because they have dollars, they should pay, but they are really joking. On the other hand, it is normal to reciprocate at some other time.

## 2.6 Personal Space and Privacy

The concept of personal space, privacy, and being alone is foreign to Mexicans. They are gregarious people and like to be surrounded by family and friends. They enjoy each other's company even if verbal interaction is kept to a minimum. In contrast to many other cultures, Mexicans are used to touching each other quite often. For example, when they are conversing, they might put their hand on your shoulder. While walking down the street, they might take your arm. In greeting each other, the intensity of touching varies from a strong handshake to a very Mexican *abrazo* (hug). They stand close when talking to each other. In public transportation, they are not offended if another passenger is so close that he rubs shoulders, hips, etc. People not used to such physical contact might accuse Mexicans of getting too close. However they are simply behaving in the same manner as they would with another Mexican. Of course, physical contact with the opposite sex may be another matter!

## 2.7 Time

Time is not "of the essence" in Mexico. They are very casual about the hour of a doctor's appointment, a visit to a friend, a party, or an official event. It is said that the only events that start on time in Mexico are the bullfights and mass. Events with fixed schedules, like movies, TV programs, ballets, and theater, do start on time. But beyond these exceptions, time in general is not a major concern. This is often frustrating for foreigners.

## 2.8 Silence

Mexican people are used to noise. When they turn on a TV, radio, tape machine, or CD player, the volume always seems to be too high. In the States, people usually don't talk in the waiting room of a doctor's office. In fact, doctors keep a supply of magazines for their patients to read. In Mexico, people engage freely in conversation with other patients. Every patient gets to hear about someone else's illnesses. Silence is rarely kept. Even at the movies, which are often subtitled, people are not always silent (especially when they are reading the subtitles out loud rather than listening to the sound).

## 2.9 Equality

Some Mexicans are very proud of their Indian heritage, while others are proud of their Hispanic blood. This pride varies, depending on the person's age, locale, economic and social class. It is difficult to generalize. However, Mexico has integrated the Indian population magnificently. In fact, the percentage of pure whites in Mexico is relatively small. The largest ethnic group is the *mestizos* (mixed Indian-Caucasian blood), then the Indians, and then those of European (mostly Spanish) descent. No matter what racial mixture a person has, when it comes to positions in government or private enterprise, qualifications are what count.

Socially, however, there are distinctions. Upper class Mexicans (business people or professionals) and service workers (maids, taxi drivers, or waiters) do not usually associate socially, for example. They may be very friendly on a casual basis, but they keep their distance because they have been brought up that way. In general, Mexicans are quite class conscious.

## 2.10 Belonging to a Group

The concept of "doing your own thing" is foreign to Mexicans. Those who always or occasionally do their own thing are not always popular members of their community. They are regarded as *raros* (strange) or sometimes as liberals.

Most Mexicans conform very much to the rules society outlines for them, particularly in small towns. Non-conformity is not seen as a positive quality. The family structure validates and reinforces this conformity. Children are brought up with the custom of obeying both people and rules. Consequently, families don't often experience the generation gap between children and parents that seems to prevail elsewhere.

Mexicans' openness is probably best conveyed through the phrase, "*Estás en tu casa*" (My home is your home/you are in your house). This expression refers not only to the physical structure of the home, but also to the customs, values, attitudes, and everything that goes along with being in a Mexican home.

## 2.11 Eating Customs and Meals

In Mexico, the knife and fork are not manipulated as in the U.S. Mexicans generally follow the European way. They do not switch the fork constantly from one hand to the other as is done in the States. Mexicans usually hold the fork in the right hand. However, when cutting, they generally move the fork to the left hand and after the food is cut, they eat with the fork in the left hand. When they have finished cutting, they switch the fork back to the right hand to eat food that doesn't need to be cut (e.g., beans, rice). Another difference is that when eating with either hand (left or right), the other does not rest in one's lap. That hand must always be *on top* of the table edge. Whether you are eating or not, both hands remain on the table, never in the lap.

In the U.S. talking with your mouth full and burping at the table are considered to be bad table manners. You will probably notice that Mexicans sometimes speak while eating. This is not always true, but it is a general pattern. However, they never burp at the table or anywhere else in the presence of others. In a very informal situation, it sometimes happens, but it is considered ill-mannered.

When offered more to eat, it is common to say "*No, gracias*" the first time but to accept the second or third time food is offered. This is a common practice. Even if you say no firmly, your hosts will continue to offer, thinking that you are following their custom. They are being polite in encouraging you. In response it is polite to be patient, compliment the food, but not to take more than you want.

Although Mexicans eat three meals a day, they seem to eat even more often because snacks (*antojitos*) are common. The principal meals are breakfast (*desayuno*), lunch (*comida*), and dinner (*cena*). *Desayuno* is often a substantial amount of food, consisting of juice, sweet rolls, eggs, toast or tortillas, and coffee. However, sometimes one has a *desayuno* consisting of only coffee and sweet rolls followed a few hours later by *almuerzo* (akin to brunch). Sometimes this includes dishes made with tortillas, chiles, and tomatoes or with meat and beans.

Lunch (*comida*) is the main meal in Mexico, and it usually takes place between 2 PM and 4 PM. *This meal often takes a long time, and the time they finish determines whether they have an evening meal or not. A *comida* usually ends with a dish of frijoles, followed by fruit or dessert and coffee. *See note at the end of this section (page 27).

Dinner (*cena*) varies. If it is a formal dinner, it might begin quite late. At home, however, most people usually eat a light meal at 7 PM or later. This may consist of only chocolate and sweet rolls. However, housewives also like to use leftovers from the afternoon dinner for this particular meal.

Mexicans snack frequently, seemingly at any time—in the mid-morning and mid-evening, as well as late at night. If they are out on the street, they may have one of the many *antojitos mexicanos* (quesadillas, tacos, etc.).

## 2.12 Family Life

It is difficult to generalize about familiy life in Mexico. Much depends on the social class and economic status of the family. However, there are some basic characteristics that can be cited as fairly general.

Typically, the family unit is very tight. Since Mexico's society is not a mobile one, families tend to live in close proximity, and the family unit remains central throughout people's lives. The Mexican extended family consists of aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and even godparents (*padrinos*).

Elderly people are shown a lot of respect. It is uncommon for old people to be placed in nursing homes; to do so might be considered an indication that their children did not care about their happiness. When older persons cannot live alone, they usually live with their children and their children's families. The opinions of older people are very much respected in most homes, and they provide a lot of guidance for the extended family.

Children are expected to live with their parents until they get married. Even children who go to college don't always move out of the house since they rarely pick a college that is out-of-town. Even after marriage, in some cases, children may bring their spouses home to live with their parents. This practice, however, is disappearing.

If living outside of the home, married children usually keep in touch with their parents, often on a daily basis. However, this practice is also changing in larger cities. Today, increased numbers of middleclass Mexican women work outside the home so that daily contact with their extended families is reserved increasingly for Sundays and holidays.

Children tend to choose a career which in many cases allows them to follow the family profession or business. For example, in many families it is common to find three generations of dentists, lawyers, or doctors, and they keep the same name professionally.

Within the family, as well as within society, distinctions between male and female roles are very marked. Although there have been slight changes in this respect, these roles are still deeply ingrained. Mexican men have been classified as *"machistas."* Women, although equal citizens under the law, often don't have the same opportunities as men. The traditional role of the Mexican women is still that of taking care of the house and children. Even though many more women are now either pursuing professional interests or are going out to earn money in shops, factories, or other people's homes to help make ends meet, there are still many small towns and provincial cities in which the older values and traditions prevail and women stay home.

In general, Mexican men do not expect to do housework. Children don't do chores either. Housework is either the wife's work or it is shared between the wife and servants—housekeepers, cooks, and maids.

Both people's individual names and their family names are very important. Because families are so close and because they often remain in the same geographical area, they sometimes build reputations based on their names. Therefore, as in the Spanish tradition, an individual's name may indicate not only his or her family but also his or her place in society. The naming system is as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| (husband) | Jose **Fernández** Flores |
| (wife) | Elena Rojas de **Fernández** F. |
| (son) | Pedro **Fernández** Rojas |
| (daughter) | Elena **Fernández** Rojas |
| (married daughter) | Teresa **Fernández** de González |
| (son-in-law) | Jesús González Burgos |

## 2.13 Leisure

Mexicans enjoy leisure time in a variety of ways. In sports, soccer (called "*fútbol*" in Spanish) is very popular. From their earliest years, children learn to kick a soccer ball. This becomes so ingrained that you can often see them kicking stones or any objects they encounter as they walk down the street. The other great passion for sportsminded Mexicans is baseball, both as a participant and as a spectator sport.

Both men and women enjoy tennis, swimming, volleyball, and basketball, which they might play depending, in great part, on their social class. Racquetball and *jai-lai* are also played but are usually popular mostly among men of the upper class. Jogging has also been common in recent years, although in more provincial towns, joggers may still be a rare sight.

Mexico offers many vacation options. The Mexican Social Security System operates various vacation centers, available to individuals who pay into this system. These centers are quite large and have all kinds of facilities. Although they are concentrated in only certain sections of the country, other privately-owned *balnearios* (resorts) for vacationers are found in many areas.

Mexicans also like to visit their numerous historical and archaeological sites. Especially on Sundays and holidays, people enjoy visiting museums and the numerous archaeological zones representing their grand Indian heritage.

Television takes up a lot of free time in Mexico. This is especially true in small towns. Major soap operas are of national importance, and the latest episodes are commonly discussed among many individuals.

Movies are also popular in Mexico. Movie theaters are full, especially on Saturday and Sunday. It seems that weekends are mainly devoted to sports during the day and movies at night.

Mexicans read a lot, whether it is newspapers, magazines, novels, or comic books. There is a great demand for magazines, and they exist in great numbers. A favorite reading form is the photo-novel (*fotonovelas*). These publications are short stories, often romances, printed with photographs in a comic-book-type format.

## 2.14 Holiday Celebrations

There are many holidays celebrated in Mexico. Most are either of a patriotic or religious nature. Some national patriotic holidays are February 5th (Anniversary of the Constitution), September 16 (Independence Day), and November 20th (Anniversary of the Revolution). Others of lesser importance are also celebrated more or less elaborately according to the area. The birthday of Benito Juárez (a famous president of Indian origin and a contemporary of Abraham Lincoln) is an example.

Of the religious holidays, perhaps the most elaborate is the Christmas season. A Mexican celebration of Christmas starts nine days before Christmas. This period is called *posadas* which is a re-enactment of the journey made by Joseph and Mary in search of a place to stay. Each night throughout this time, groups of friends go from house to house singing traditional songs, ending with the traditional *piñata*. On the last night, which is Christmas Eve, the celebration is much more sedate. Both Christmas and New Year's Eve are family celebrations.

Sometimes younger adults in the family may attend parties and the older members stay at home. Usually the grandparents or some other family member's home is large enough to accommodate a large group.

Another important celebration of both religious and pagan origin is Carnival. It takes place just before the Lenten season begins, forty days before Easter Sunday. The celebration varies from city to city. In some areas there is no Carnival celebration at all, whereas in other areas, notably Mazatlán and Veracruz, the celebration includes parades, contests, costumes, etc., over several days and is organized with the support of the state government.

Holy Week (Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday) is both a period of religious celebration and an opportunity for at least a long weekend. Many people leave their own city to go to a vacation area, often one of the coastal areas. This provides a chance to get away from both one's job and home routine.

The Virgin of Guadalupe enjoys a special day on the Mexican calendar. Her feast day is December 12, and although not a federal holiday, it is still widely observed and banks are closed. Mexicans are also accustomed to celebrating their own saint's days (the day of the saint after whom they are named). Birthdays are often not celebrated as much as one's saint's day.

Thanksgiving and Valentine's day are not celebrated. However, Halloween, occurring on the eve between All Saint's Day and All Soul's Day, is an important religious celebration in Mexico. In some towns, there are very special traditional observances.

In general, Mexicans like parties and celebrations. They always seem to find reasons to have a party, and they enjoy both traditional and popular music, lots of people, lots of noise, food, etc. Practically anything can provide a reason for a party—a birth, a christening, a birthday or saint's day, a farewell, etc. Sometimes small social gatherings evolve into a dance party that might last until the early morning hours. Food might be served when the party is over, or friends may go out to the street to find one of the all-night restaurants where they can top off the festivities with *pozole* or a dish of spicy *menudo* (tripe in a hot sauce).

A note on these generalizations:

The preceeding observations on Mexican customs and values are generally true of traditional Mexican society. However, the last few years have brought many changes. Some are particularly apparent in the industrialized North, where the effect of U.S. customs and values is as strong as the effect of Mexican customs and values is in the American Southwest. Other changes are more apparent in Mexico City. For example, people who commute to work for two or three hours across what is now the largest city in the Americas, if not in the world, do not run home for the midday meal. Furthermore, though Mexicans have traditionally tended to stay in their native hometowns, today there are millions of people who have uprooted themselves to look for work in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and other big cities. All this has had a profound effect on their culture. So take these generalizations with a grain of salt and then contrast them with what you find in reality in Mexico.

# 3. COUNTRY FACTS

As you become more comfortable living in Mexico, you will find that you want to know more facts about the country; for example, how it is organized and governed, etc. This section consists of the following subjects:

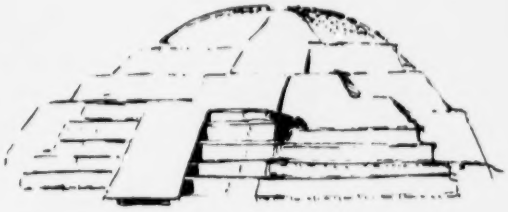

3.1 History
3.2 Map: Cities of Mexico
3.3 People
3.4 Land and Climate (with map)
3.5 Government
3.6 Economy
3.7 Education
3.8 Religion
3.9 Arts


## 3.1 History

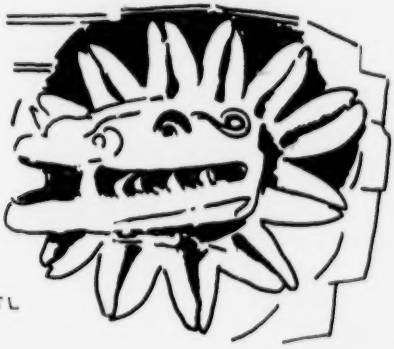
Mexico has a rich and complex history. The Mexican people, in general, are fascinated by it and feel strongly that their past is important to their national identity. This is particularly true of the pre-Colonial period. Since the Revolution of 1920, the government has focused popular interest on the succession of advanced Mexican Indian civilizations before the coming of Cortés and the Conquest (1521). These cultures were in many ways as impressive as their contemporaries in Europe and Asia. It does not diminish the importance of the Mayas, the Toltecs, or the Aztecs to point out the important fact that today's Mexican civilization is not only Indian but also very Spanish; it is a *mestizo* or mixed culture.

The love of this *mestizo* culture for its pre-Hispanic past is very widespread and significant as is the way it ignores its Spanish roots. Images of ancient Mexico are seen everywhere. For example, Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor, is a great national hero. Mexicans are proud that the basics of Indian food — corn, tomatoes, chiles, avocadoes, and chocolate — are still the basis of typical Mexican cooking. By

contrast, they say little about Spanish culture. They take for granted the wheat and rice, the oranges, lemons, bananas, and sugar; the meat of the domesticated animals they eat every day; the wheel; the colonial architecture of every town and city; or even their Roman Catholic faith and their language—all of which came with the Spanish. And they rarely mention Cortés, who founded *mestizo* Mexico after conquering the Aztec empire. There are no streets or towns named after him, no statues in his honor. Mexico's Spanishness is everywhere in its culture, but its Indian heritage is what Mexicans stress as being most distinctly Mexican.



TEOTIHUACAN



QUETZALCOATL

What we know about that Indian heritage is spotty and constantly being revised as new literary and archeological discoveries are made. The history of pre-Aztec times has been particularly obscure. This is partly because most of its cultures were overthrown and partly because its written history was burned, first by the Aztec Itzcóatl and then with religious fervor by the Spanish. History is always written by the victors, but luckily later Mexican revolutionaries rarely burned books they disagreed with; like most revolutionaries, they just read them selectively.

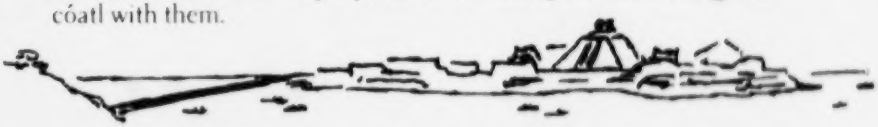
***This rough outline of Mexican history may help you hold on to the details in the following narrative history.***

| | |
|---|---|
| **up to 1500 BC** | **The Archaic period.** First settlements. Agriculture begins. Corn is discovered. |
| **1500 to 300 BC** | **The Pre-Classic period.** The first pottery. Starting around 1200 BC, the Olmecs develop "the mother culture," the foundation for all later cultures. |
| **300 BC to 900 AD** | **The Classic Period.** Three great cultures flourish in different parts of Mexico: The Maya in the Yucatán and south, the Monte Albán Zapotec in Oaxaca, and from 100 to 900 AD the Teotihuacán. |
| **900 to 1520 AD** | **The Post-Classic period.** A succession of warlike northern nomadic tribes, generally called Chichimecs, establish cities throughout Mexico: the Toltecs (900–1150), the Mixtecs of Monte Albán (1200–), the Tepanecs (1320–), and finally the Mexicas or Aztecs, who founded their city, Tenochtitlán (Mexico City), in Lake Texcoco and became independent of the Tepanecs in 1376. |
| **1420–1521 AD** | **The Aztec Empire.** |
| **1519–1521 AD** | **The Conquest.** Cortés conquers the Aztecs. The colony of New Spain (Mexico) lasts 300 years. |
| **1810–1821 AD** | **The War of Independence.** Spanish colonial rule overthrown; a complicated century of dictatorships and republican reforms follows. |
| **1910–1920** | **The Revolution.** Social, economic, and political reform under one-party rule. That party, reorganized as PRI in 1929, is still in power. |

Like the people of many other early civilizations, the Mexicans studied the stars. Rituals relating to tracking the stars were central to the religions and to the understanding of the seasons and of history for all of the great Mexican Indian cultures. We know little about the Olmecs aside from their huge monumental heads and astronomical/mathematical calculations, which show that they understood the concept of zero. The Olmecs were succeeded by the Mayas, whose calendar was in some ways more accurate than our own and who were the most sophisticated astronomers of the pre-modern world. Much later the giant Aztec calendar stone shows that the religious importance of these studies continued until the Conquest.

In all of the pre-Hispanic Mexican cultures, the seasons and all other vital natural phenomena were understood to be controlled by or to be attributes of the gods. Huitzilopochtli, one of the most important Aztec gods, was the god to whom human sacrifices were made to keep the sun coming up each day. Another example was Tlaloc, the god of rain and thunder.

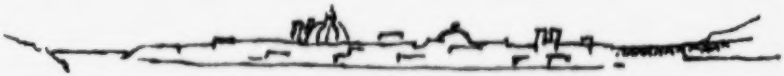
Not all of the Mexican gods were identified with nature; not all had bloody sacrificial rites. One of the strongest was Quetzalcóatl. He first appears as a great feathered serpent with a huge temple compound at Teotihuacán. This was a city of temples, as the Aztecs later called it, "The city of the gods." (Mysteriously, *teo* means "god" in both Indo-European languages and in *Náhuatl*, the Aztec indigenous language.) Today the temples have been uncovered, but the surrounding city awaits the archeologists. It had about 200,000 people and was not only the largest city of the Americas but at its peak the largest in the world. Around 650 AD, this greatest city of the Classic Period was sacked by northern nomads and its people scattered taking their belief in Quetzalcóatl with them.



In about 900, a nomadic tribe called the Toltecs settled in the Valley of Mexico and adopted Quetzalcóatl, who was not a war god but a bringer of peace and all the civilized arts. A hundred years later a light skinned, bearded, and blue eyed man came to the Toltecs, was accepted as their priest-king, and revealed himself as Quetzalcóatl incarnate. He moved his capital to Tula and expanded his empire and his religion throughout central Mexico. Then he was ousted from power after a mythological struggle with his rival Texcatlipoca, the god of war. This man and his followers escaped to Cholula and then built Chichén Itzá in Maya country. Finally, he sailed away to the east promising to return and rule all of Mexico in peace on his birth year in the next calendar cycle, the year "one-reed" or 1519.

With the sack of Tula in about 1150, Toltec power declined, but their city remained a center for the worship of Quetzalcóatl. In 1320 the Tepanecs consolidated control of central Mexico. Then the Mexicas or Aztecs rose to power. They had first ended their nomadic wandering around 1325 when they saw a sign foretold years before, an eagle eating a snake while sitting on a cactus. (This vision, an odd twist on the feathered serpent, is now the symbol of the modern Mexican state.) The Aztecs found their eagle on an island in Lake Texcoco, and there they built their island city, Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City). In 1376 they won independence from the Tepanecs. Then, starting in 1420, they began the bloody conquest of their neighbors, and within 100 years they ruled the largest of all the Mesoamerican empires.

Then came the year "one-reed." Moctezuma, the devout priest-emperor of the Aztecs, nervously awaited the second coming of Quetzalcóatl. As if on cue, Hernán Cortés and his white, bearded men arrived. Moctezuma naturally greeted them as gods and sent gifts of gold, turquoise, and the feathers of the quetzal bird, sacred to Quetzalcóatl. With incredible courage, imagination, and greed, Cortés decided to seize the empire and the source of the gold. He had horses and steel swords and guns, all of which the Aztecs lacked. Despite these advantages, Cortés and his small band of soldiers would never have been able to defeat Moctezuma's vast army without the additional manpower of Indian allies. These were subject cities that rebelled against the severe rule of the Aztec central government. Then, once that government was destroyed, Cortés swiftly and skillfully substituted a Spanish, Christian empire for the Aztec one. It lasted for three hundred years.

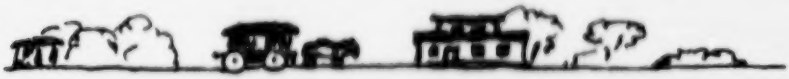


It is said that the Mexico of today was formed during this colonial period of the country's history. Many cities and towns were founded; universities were begun; and Spanish architecture left its mark. On the great central plateau, the Spaniards and various Indian races began the long process of amalgamation, still going on today.

After Cortés, New Spain, as it was called, was ruled by a series of viceroys who had absolute rule. Their form of government still influences Mexico today in that its presidents wield tremendous power (by U.S. standards). The land was divided up between various Spanish supporters of the viceroys, and those who were granted the land also had power over the Indians who were living there. Second only to the crown in power was the church which by 1821 owned 50% of the property and capital of the country.

There were no serious movements to overthrow Spanish rule in Mexico until Napoleon's army invaded Spain in 1808 and the legitimate Spanish monarchy collapsed. On September 15, 1808, Father Miguel Hidalgo called his people together and raised the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe with the cry: "*¡Mexicanos, viva México!*" This action started off a rebellion that was to end on September 9, 1821, with the country's independence from Spain. Agustín de Iturbide was then elected regent. A few months later, he dissolved the congress and proclaimed himself Emperor of Mexico, taking the title of "Agustín I." He was exiled in short order. Then, like Napoleon, he returned in the hope of reclaiming his throne. This time he was tried and shot.

After Mexico had existed as a constitutional republic for nearly 10 years after the death of Iturbide, General Antonio López de Santa Ana organized a revolt, abolished the federalist constitution, and set up a centralized government. It was during this time of Santa Ana that Texas was separated from the Mexican state of Coahuila. Soon more and more "gringos" moved into Texas, leading eventually to a war between Mexico and the U.S. in 1836. At first Santa Ana was successful—he took the Alamo from the U.S. Texans—but then he was captured at San Jacinto. Texas declared itself to be independent. Later, in 1845, the U.S. annexed Texas and then provoked Mexico to attack this new U.S. territory. In response, the U.S. declared war and invaded Mexico, capturing Mexico City. By the early part of 1848, the war ended with Mexico losing not only Texas, but the land now constituting California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada—in all, about half of its territory. This action, one year before the 1849 Gold Rush, is still deeply resented.



Many years of anarchy and civil war followed during which one of Mexico's greatest heroes emerged. Benito Juárez became one of Mexico's most significant presidents. A man of Indian origin and humble beginnings, he rose through the Justice Department to become president during one of Mexico's most difficult periods. After the fall of Santa Ana, Juárez tried to unify Mexico under the Constitution of 1857. When he refused to recognize the rebel leaders of the Conservative Party who opposed the constitution, he was forced to flee to Panama. However, he returned to Veracruz and created the Reform Laws which separated church and state. This policy plunged Mexico into a three-year civil war which eventually bankrupted the country. Mexico was forced to suspend payments on loans from Spain, France, and England.

In 1862, Spanish, French, and British military forces entered Mexico to negotiate their debts. The French stayed on after the Spanish and British left and began an invasion of the country. In 1863, the French placed the Austrian Archduke Maximilian in power, declaring Mexico a monarchy. However, Maximilian was able to stay in power only as long as the French troops supported him. As the U.S. Civil War ended, Juárez asked the U.S. to enforce the Monroe Doctrine and demand a French withdrawal, which Lincoln did. With difficulties in France and the implied threat of the huge U.S. army to the north, Napoleon III removed his troops from Mexico, leaving Maximilian with only a small contingent of conservative forces. Juárez' army defeated Maximilian at Querétaro in 1867, and he was executed. In 1872 Benito Juárez died in office leaving an unstable government. However, Juárez had a profound and lasting effect on Mexico through his struggle for an independent and just democracy. He is considered to be Mexico's Abraham Lincoln.

In 1876, Porfirio Díaz assumed the Mexican presidency, and he remained as head of state either directly or through a puppet president for the following 30 years. His efficient military and his strong, centralized rule made Mexico safe for the wealthy and foreign travelers, but he tolerated no political opposition. Pressures for liberalization and democratic change were repressed, as they were in the U.S. and Europe during the same period. Revolutions were kept down by brutally crushing peasants' rights. The common man of Mexico, whom Juárez had championed, was perhaps worse off than ever. Land and power were still held in the hands of a few, while many peasants led miserable lives of hunger and destitution. At the same time, the Díaz government forced modernization on Mexico. It encouraged new technology and industry which it financed by foreign investment and trade. It was during this time that most of Mexico's railroads were built. For the first time in history, the country had a balanced budget. Mexico appeared on the outside to be peaceful and prosperous, and this was widely accepted as a blessing after several generations of civil war and stagnation. However, the political and social price was too high; the country was sitting on a powder keg ready to explode. Of course, Mexico was not alone in this. At this same time, revolution was a real possibility in most European countries, and Russia and China were ready to blow. When Francisco Madero won the election of 1910, Díaz tried to wrest the power from him by force, but Madero kept the presidency and Don Porfirio fled to Europe.

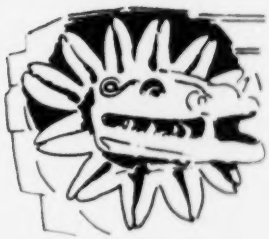
Many warring factions were struggling for power at this time. Again Mexico faced civil war. For ten terrible years, there was anarchy and assassination. The presidency was passed from one man to another. Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata led revolts in the north and south. Their peasant armies looted and burned the rich haciendas where at one time they had worked. Much property was destroyed in the name of the Revolution. The poor of the cities and countryside suffered as much as the rich and middle class. Much of the economy was destroyed. Finally, with the nation exhausted, elections were held, and General Alvaro Obregón was elected president in 1920. He restored peace and began to build rural schools and increase industrial and agricultural production.

In 1929, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) was founded under the Portes Gil administration. This political party successfully took over control of the central government from the military and provided Mexico with a strong political institution. Since the founding of the PRI, only civilians have been elected to office, and there have been no military revolts. Although there are opposition parties with local and regional power bases, PRI has maintained one-party control of the central government under an extremely powerful presidency. They have discouraged any strong opposition and are still in power.

In 1934 during the worldwide depression, Lázaro Cárdenas was elected president. Cárdenas increased school construction and land distribution among peasants. In 1938, he nationalized the petroleum industry by ousting American and British oil companies. He improved labor conditions and met the demands of workers which had long been neglected.

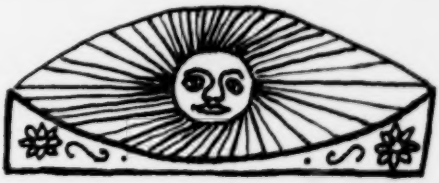
Mexico has been at peace since 1920, enjoying stable governments and making advancements in industry and agriculture. However, in recent years, corruption from the central government on down to local officials has shaken the faith of many of the people. At the same time, Mexico has many serious social, political, and economic challenges to meet. Still, at present there is hope. The Mexican people are making real progress in increasing trade and economic stability; under the political struggles of the moment, there is a strong and unified national feeling. And Mexicans look to their colorful history for inspiration and a source of pride.

## 3.2 Map: Cities of Mexico



## 3.3 People

Mexico is the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world with a population approaching 100 million. It is the second most populous country in Latin America (after Brazil). More than one half of the people live in central Mexico. Three quarters of the population lives in cities while the rest live in rural areas. About 65% of the people are a mixture of Indian and Spanish, making Mexico one of the most *mestizo* countries in Latin America. About a quarter of the population is Indian.



Many Mexicans emigrate from areas lacking in job opportunities, such as in the underdeveloped southern states and the crowded central plateau, and go to the industrialized urban centers and the developing border areas of the northern states.

According to estimates, the urban population of Mexico City has grown to more than 22 million, making it the largest urban concentration in the world. Guadalajara is the second largest city with about 6 million people. Monterrey and other urban areas in the northern region of the country also show large increases in population.

Many cities and towns resemble those of Spain. The plaza or main square of most towns is planned in the same fashion, with a garden, complete with a band stand and park benches, surrounded by a church (sometimes a cathedral), public buildings, and restaurants. The plaza is a convenient public place where people congregate on social and on special occasions. Traditionally, the Sunday *paseo* around the plaza was a social event where the unmarried young people came to see and be seen.

## 3.4 Land and Climate

Mexico has varied climates, including tropical, temperate, and some colder areas. The topography of Mexico ranges from low desert plains and jungle-like coastal strips to high plateaus and rugged mountains. Beginning at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico, an extension of a South American mountain range runs north almost to

Mexico City, where it divides to form the coastal Occidental (west) and Oriental (east) ranges of the Sierra Madre. Between these ranges lies the great central plateau, a rugged tableland 2,400 kilometers (1,500 miles) long and as much as 800 kilometers (500 miles) wide. From a low desert plain in the north, it rises to 2,400 meters (8,000 feet) above sea level near Mexico City.

## *Historic Sites:*

1. Teotihuacán 2. El Tajín 3. Monte Albán 4. Palenque 5. Uxmal 6. Chichén Itzá 7. Cobá 8. Tulum

## *Geographical Features:*

9. Popocatépetl 10. Citlatépetl 11. Sierra Madre Occidental 12. Sierra Madre Oriental 13. Sierra Madre del Sur

Mexico's climate is generally more closely related to altitude and rainfall than to latitude. Most of Mexico is dry; only about 12% of the total area receives adequate rainfall in all seasons, while about one half is deficient in moisture throughout the year. Temperatures range from 60 to 100°F (15.5 to 37.7°C) in tropical areas, whereas the weather in the higher elevations may be damp and cold. Many areas of central Mexico experience a dry season during the winter months and a rainy season in the summer. Pack accordingly. You will want warm-weather clothing, a water-repellent topcoat, and perhaps a warm sweater which you can put on or peel off as the weather and comfort dictate. Footwear for both dress and rugged terrain (including cobblestoned streets) are important.

## 3.5 Government

Mexico consists of 31 states and a federal district. It is officially called *Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, or the United Mexican States, and is often referred to as "*la República de México*" (the Republic of Mexico).

Its three branches of federal government are the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The legislative branch consists of a General Congress made up of two chambers—the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. There are two senators for each state and two for the Federal District. Neither senators nor deputies may be re-elected for a succeeding term. The constitution provides that the Congress legislate on all matters pertaining to the national government, the territories, and the Federal District.

The president is elected by popular vote for a period of six years and may not be re-elected. The president of Mexico wields much more power than the president does in the United States. In Mexico he makes all important decisions and is the principal lawmaker in the nation. He can declare war and decree new laws. Like the U.S. president, he also upholds the laws of Congress, appoints high government officials, commands the military, and conducts foreign affairs. There are 16 executive departments: Attorney General, Interior, State, National Defense, Navy, Treasury, National Patrimony, Commerce and Industry, Agriculture, Communications, Public Works, Hydraulic Resources, Education, Public Health, Labor, and the Secretariat of the Presidency.

The Judiciary consists of a Supreme Court, the highest court in the country, and district and circuit courts.

There are many political parties in Mexico, but only the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)*, has held the presidency and control of the Congress. It has been the most important political force in the nation for over 60 years.

## 3.6 Economy

The Mexican economy is still firmly based on agriculture even though industry has advanced greatly in recent years. The government controls most of the larger farms and has funded huge irrigation projects. Major crops are corn, coffee, sugar, and cotton. Petroleum is one of Mexico's most valuable natural resources and one of its major exports, along with coffee and winter vegetables. Mexico was the first Latin American country to become an important oil producer. Mexican industry now includes petrochemicals and pharmaceuticals, as well as steel, trucks, automobiles, textiles, and appliances.

In the 1980's the collapse of world oil prices caused severe problems for the Mexican economy. During the '70's, the government had extended social benefits and other government spending along with monumental graft and corruption. With the expected oil income lost, the national debt suddenly ballooned to huge proportions. However, the international manufacturing sites in the north have continued to boom, and the prospects for a North American Free Trade Agreement have simulated both Mexican and international investment throughout Mexico. Working closely with the World Bank and the international banking community, the government has become fiscally more conservative and reduced the national debt.

Despite these advances, however, the political situation is troubled. Inflation has wiped out many people's savings, and the standard of living is lower for most Mexicans than it was in the '70's. The population explosion in Mexico, where large families are still the rule, particularly among the poor, has also caused economic, social, and political instability over the last quarter of a century.

## 3.7 Education

About 1500 years ago, the Mayans correctly measured and registered the weather so that they could predict the seasons using a calendar developed by observing the stars; they also developed the Olmec system for mathematics into one of remarkable sophistication. With such a background, it is hard to believe that Mexicans did not do much about public education until the 20th century. This failure was in part due to the long dominance of foreign powers. Certainly the Spaniards were not keen on educating the Indians (with the exception of the children of the heads of government). They feared that if the Indians learned too much, Spanish colonial control would be more difficult; Indians were primarily taught about religion. However, there has always been a core of Mexican culture which has valued learning. As early as 1551, the Viceroy Luis de Velasco prepared the statutes necessary for the establishment of the National University of Mexico and also established the first printing press in the New World.

Benito Juárez, the Zapotec Indian who became President of Mexico, implemented several changes, including a program of free public education in 1860. This program still exists today. Implementing public education has not always been easy or politically popular, and both the Church and State struggled to delineate educational responsibilities. In 1944, Manuel Avila Camacho, the president, started a national campaign requiring every Mexican between 18 and 60 years of age who knew how to read and write to teach another Mexican (6 to 60 years old). Camacho made free books available to everyone. Children were teaching parents, secretaries taught porters, and housewives taught their maids. The program was established to last for one year, but the campaign continued much longer. As a result, the index of illiteracy diminished by 75 percent.

Education in Mexico is being decentralized and expanded. A major attempt is under way to promote educational activity in rural areas, and the increase in school enrollments since 1970 has been dramatic. In 1980, 86% of the population between ages 6 and 14 were in school; this was 16 million children.

Mexicans are proud of their schools and the progress of their educational system. Public education is free including agricultural and vocational schools. There are also numerous universities which are well attended. Public schooling consists of five years of elementary school, five of secondary, and two of preparatory, prior to entering the university. The first ten years of schooling are mandatory, but they are not always available to the poor in remote areas or in the slums of the great cities.

## 3.8 Religion

Mexican law provides for freedom of religion. However, almost 90% of Mexicans are Roman Catholic, including many Indian tribes which combine their old customs with Christian beliefs. Paradoxically, many Mexicans also resent the Church because until this century it was very powerful and very conservative, resisting all kinds of reform. The Revolution and the government since then have had an "anti-clerical" bias and have tried to keep the Church out of politics, with some success. In general, Mexicans feel both a resistance and a strong devotion to the Church.

Mexico has some of the most beautiful churches in the world. The cathedral of Mexico City, the first in Mexico, is more than 450 years old having been started in 1525. Several sections have been added and today it is the largest church in the country. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (the Virgin of Guadalupe) is the Patron Saint of Mexico and of the Americas, and a basilica was built in her honor. In 1531 the Virgin appeared to Juan Diego, an Indian, atop a small hill to the north of the city. The Virgin told Juan Diego that she wanted a church built at that spot, and Juan was supposed to take this message to the bishop. It took several other apparitions before the bishop believed the story. The Virgin finally appeared painted on Juan's blanket, showing Indian features unlike the traditional European images of virgins. Today, many people visit the the old Basilica started in 1536 and the huge, ultra modern New Basilica built in 1976 to house the miraculous painting of the Virgin. There are many sightseers, but most Mexicans come to pray and to seek favors of the Virgin.

Besides Christmas, which continues for twelve days ending with Epiphany (Day of the Wise Kings), and Holy Week (Palm Sunday through Easter), Mexico celebrates many other religious holidays. There is even a day for the animals (San Roque) when people take their animals to be blessed by the priests. In general, people are quite observant of religious customs in Mexico, and religion is an important part of their daily lives.

## 3.9 Arts

Mexican art is among the most diverse and beautiful in the world. Its different manifestations—whether in architecture, painting, sculpture, weaving, or other forms—reveal great influence from their Spanish heritage and even more from their Mayan, Aztec, and other Indian origins. Each region of the country has produced its own specific types of folk art, often displayed in museums all over the world. The tradition of Mexican folk art is one of the richest in the Americas. Handicrafts are taught in schools, and every school child knows something about folk art and crafts. Twentieth Century Mexican art is probably best known for the works of its many famous muralists, such as David Alfaro, Siqueros, Diego Rivera, Rufino Tamayo, and Orozco.

Mexican artists and intellectuals alike have consistently drawn inspiration from a rich history of Indian civilizations, colonial influence, revolution, and the development of the modern Mexican state. In turn, Mexican art has influenced every aspect of Mexican life. Its influences in modern design (clothing and interior decorating) are very marked, as is its artistic influence in public displays, architecture, and the like.

Mexican art can be seen in churches, museums, art galleries, and public buildings all over Mexico. However, the greatest concentration is in Mexico City. The National Art Museum and the *Museo Franz Mayer* have wide ranging collections. Murals can be seen at the *Museo Mural Diego Rivera*, at the National Palace (offices of the president and government) on the *Zócalo* or central plaza of the city, and at the *Palacio de Bellas Artes*, where the wonderful *Ballet Folklórico de México* performs. Also at the *Zócalo* are the *Catedral Metropolitana* and the Sagrario Church. Around the corner, for everyone interested in ancient Mexico, are the ruins of the Great Temple of the Aztecs, *el Templo Mayor*, and its new museum. Finally, no trip to Mexico City is complete without a visit to the National Musuem of Anthropology in Chapultepec Park, without argument one of the very finest museums in the world.

# 4. THE SPANISH LANGUAGE

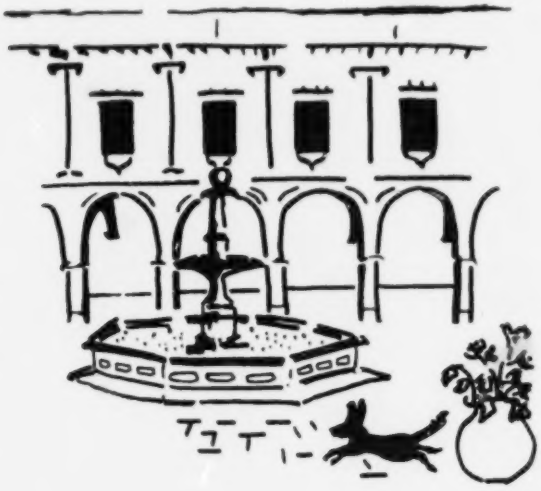
Spanish belongs to the Romance family of languages—along with French, Italian, Portuguese, and several others. These languages all have their origins in ancient Latin. Other languages like Greek, Italian, French, and Arabic have also exerted some influence on Spanish. With the discovery of the New World, Spanish was brought to the Americas. There it borrowed many words over the centuries from its contact with the indigenous tongues. In recent years, Spanish has also borrowed from English, as well as contributing many words to the English language. It is no wonder that many Spanish words may seem familiar to you.

Nearly 3 billion people speak Spanish, the world's fourth major language. Spanish is spoken over a vast area from Spain to the Americas, including Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, South America (except Brazil), and many parts of the United States.

Despite some variation in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, Spanish speakers can usually understand each other despite the region. In addition, other languages are sometimes spoken in several predominantly Spanish-speaking areas. For example, in Spain—an area about four times that of New York State—Basque (*vasco*), Galician (*gallego*), and Catalan (*catalán*) are spoken, and in Mexico and other Latin American nations, hundreds of indigenous tongues survive.

Spanish spread rapidly throughout the Iberian peninsula in the latter part of the 15th century when Fernando de Aragón and Isabel de Castilla married, uniting Spain. Fernando accepted the speech of Castile, making Castilian (or Spanish) the official language of the country. At the same time, the defeat of the Moors in Granada in 1492 diminished Arab influence which had affected the Spanish tongue for over 700 years. Columbus' historic voyage that same year took Castilian to the New World, and that explains its widespread use today.

In the New World, the language of the *conquistadores* underwent various changes hastened by its contact with the native tongues. Many new words for the things unknown to the Peninsular speakers were borrowed, reflecting their "American" experience. In areas of heaviest Indian influence, such as Mexico, Guatemala, and the Andean regions, the new words made Spanish a marvellously expressive and colorful language which often distinguishes Latin American speech even today. Immigrants from other areas of Europe and the slaves brought from Africa further changed Latin American Spanish. And more recently, English has had a profound effect as contact between neighbors north and south increases.



Despite pronunciation and vocabulary variations throughout the Hispanic world, Spanish generally follows the same grammatical patterns everywhere. The Academy of the Spanish Language (*Academia de la Lengua Española*) also strives to maintain consistent standards. Several dialect areas are commonly recognized: central and northern Spain (which use Castilian), southern Spain (whose speech is closer to that of their Caribbean counterparts), Mexico, and the coastal and mountainous regions of Central and South America. Fortunately, regional differences do not normally interfere with communication. When traveling, however, you would do well to follow the patterns of the region you visit.

## 4.1. A Pronunciation Guide

The chart below will be your guide to the transcriptions which follow in this book. Review the chart to see how Spanish sounds are properly pronounced. Three points should be stressed about the chart. First, luckily the Spanish spelling system is much more phonetic than English. Its rules are simple and consistent. Second, pay special attention to vowels since they affect the overall pronunciation of a word and are crucial to making yourself understood. Third, note that word stress is indicated by showing the syllable to be accentuated in capital letters as in the example: *turista* (too-REES-tah).

### *Vowels*

| Spanish spelling | Approximate sound in English | Symbol | Transcription example |
|---|---|---|---|
| *a* | (father) | ah | *turista* (too-REES-tah) |
| *e* | (say) | ay | *peso* (PAY-soh) |
| *e* | (met) | eh | *cerca* (SEHR-kah) |
| *i* | (beet) | ee | *día* (DEE-ah) |
| *o* | (both) | oh | *foto* (FOH-toh) |
| *u* | (booth) | oo | *mucho* (MOO-choh) |

### *Frequent Vowel Combinations (Diphthongs)*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *ai* | (ripe) | y | *bailar* (by-LAHR) |
| *au* | (now) | ow | *auto* (OW-toh) |
| *ei* | (may) | ay | *peine* (PAY-nay) |
| *ie* | (yet) | yeh | *siempre* (SYEHM-pray) |
| *oy* | (soy sauce) | oy | *estoy* (ehs-TOY) |
| *ue* | (wet) | weh | *bueno* (BWEH-noh) |

## Consonants

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *b / d / k / l / m / n / p / s / t* | similar to English | |
| c* (before e/i/y) | soft s sound (save) | *cine* (SEE-nay) |
| c (before a/o/u) | hard k sound (key) | *cosa* (KOH-sah) |
| *cc* | ks sound (accept) | *lección* (lehk-SYON) |
| *ch* | hard ch sound (champ) | *mucho* (MOO-choh) |
| *g* (before a/o/u) | hard g (go) | *goma* (GOH-mah) |
| *g* (before e/i) | breathy h (heat) | *general* (heh-neh-RAHL) |
| *h* | always silent | *hasta* (__AHS-tah) |
| *j* | breathy h (hot) | *José* (hoh-SAY) |
| *ll* | sound of English y (yes) | *silla* (SEE-yah) |
| *ñ* | slurred ny (canyon) | *señor* (sehn-YOR) |
| qu | as in English k (kite) | *que* (kay) |
| r | single trill | *pero* (PEH-roh) |
| rr | several trills | *rosa* (RROH-sah) |
| | | *perro* (PEH-rroh) |
| v | as in English b (bite) | *vaca* (BAH-kah) |
| x | as in English ks (rocks) | *taxi* (TAHK-see) |
| z* | English s | *zona* (SOH-nah) |

(**Note:* In parts of Spain, "z," and also "c" before e/i, are pronounced like the English "th" as in think. Examples: zona (THOH-nah), cera (THEH-rah), cinco (THEEN-koh). In this book, however, Latin American pronunciation is used throughout, as described in the above chart.

## 4.2. Some Basic Grammar

Following is a brief outline of the essential features of Spanish.

### *Articles*

Nouns in Spanish are either masculine or feminine. Articles agree in gender and number with the noun.

1. Definite article (the): *el, la, los, las*

| | **singular** | | **plural** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| masculine | *el niño* | the boy | *los niños* | the boys |
| feminine | *la casa* | the house | *las casas* | the houses |

2. Indefinite article (a / an): *un, una, unos, unas*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| masculine | *un viaje* | a trip | *unos viajes* | (some) trips |
| feminine | *una carta* | a letter | *unas cartas* | (some) letters |

### *Nouns*

1. Most nouns ending in *-o* are masculine. Those ending in *-a* are usually feminine.

*hermano* brother *hermana* sister

2. Nouns ending in a vowel add s to form the plural; nouns ending in a consonant add **-es**.

*Señora* > *Señoras* *Señor* > *Señores*

3. To show possession, use the preposition *de* (of).

| | |
|---|---|
| *las casas de los señores* | the men's houses |
| *la camisa del* niño* | the boy's shirt |
| *los zapatos de la niña* | the girl's shoes |
| *los zapatos de las niñas* | the girls' shoes |
| *la maleta de Juan* | John's suitcase |

*(*del* is the contraction of *de* + *el*).

4. A group including masculine and feminine individuals or items is grammatically masculine.

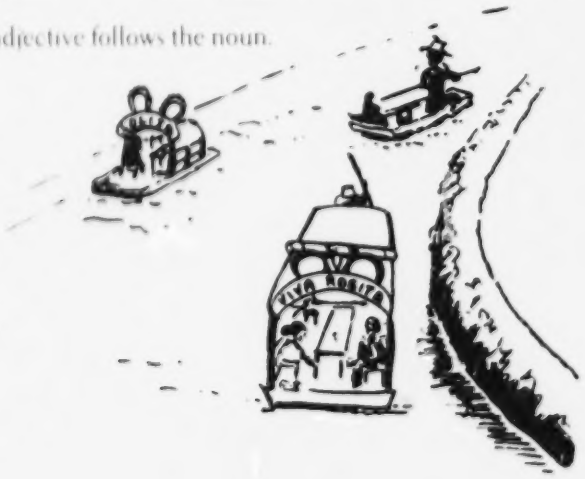
*Un niño y dos niñas son tres niños.*
One boy and two girls are three children.

## *Adjectives*

1. Adjectives agree with the nouns they describe in gender and number. Most adjectives form their plurals as do the nouns, by adding -s to a vowel ending (usually -*a* or -*o*) and -*es* to a consonant ending.

| | |
|---|---|
| *una casa pequeña* | a little (small) house |
| *dos casas pequeñas* | two little houses |
| *un niño pequeño* | a little boy |
| *dos niños pequeños* | two little boys |
| *un libro español* | a Spanish book |
| *dos libros españoles* | two Spanish books |

2. As a rule, the adjective follows the noun.



3. Possessive adjectives.

| | singular | plural |
|---|---|---|
| my | *mi* | *mis* |
| your | *tu* | *tus* |
| his/her/its | *su* | *sus* |
| our | *nuestro(a)* | *nuestros(as)* |
| your | *su* | *sus* |
| their | *su* | *sus* |

Possessive adjectives agree with the thing possessed, not with the possessor.

| | |
|---|---|
| *su libro* | **his** or **her** or **their** book |
| *su habitación* | **his** or **her** or **their** room |
| *sus casas* | **his** or **her** or **their** houses |

4. Comparative and superlative are formed by adding *más* (more) or *menos* (less) and *lo más* (the most) and *lo menos* (the least), respectively, before the adjective.

| | |
|---|---|
| *bonito* | beautiful |
| *más bonito* | more beautiful |
| *lo más bonito* | the most beautiful |
| *menos bonito* | less beautiful |
| *lo menos bonito* | the least beautiful |

## Adverbs

These are formed by adding *-mente* to the feminine form of the adjective (if it differs from the masculine); otherwise to the masculine.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *lento(a)* | slow | *fácil* | easy |
| *lentamente* | slowly | *fácilmente* | easily |

Adjectives are sometimes used as adverbs, e.g., *fuerte* can mean strong or strongly.

## *Pronouns*

1. Possessive pronouns.

| | singular | plural |
|---|---|---|
| mine | *mío (a)* | *míos (as)* |
| yours (fam. sing.) | *tuyo (a)* | *tuyos (as)* |
| yours (polite form) | *suyo (a)* | *suyos (as)* |
| his/hers/its | *suyo (a)* | *suyos (as)* |
| ours | *nuestro (a)* | *nuestros (as)* |
| yours (fam. pl.) | *suyo (a)* | *suyos (as)* |
| theirs | *suyo (a)* | *suyos (as)* |

Possessive pronouns agree with the thing possessed, not with the possessor.

- *María, el libro es tuyo.* María, the book is yours.

2. Demonstrative pronouns.

| | masculine | feminine | neuter |
|---|---|---|---|
| this | *éste* | *ésta* | *esto* |
| these | *éstos* | *éstas* | *estos* |
| that | *ése* | *ésa* | *eso* |
| | *aquél* | *aquélla* | *aquello* |
| those | *ésos* | *ésas* | *esos* |
| | *aquéllos* | *aquéllas* | *aquellos* |

*Me gusta esto.* I like this.
*¡Éstas son casas pequeñas!* These are little houses!

The above forms are also used as demonstrative adjectives, but written accent marks are dropped from the feminine and masculine forms.

*Esas niñas van a clase.* Those girls are going to class.

3. Personal pronouns.

| | subject | direct object | indirect object |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | *yo* | *me* | *me* |
| you (fam.) | *tú* | *te* | *te* |
| you (pol.) | *usted* | *lo* | *se* |
| he | *él* | *lo* | *le* |
| she | *ella* | *la* | *le* |
| it | *él/ella* | *lo/la* | *le* |
| we | *nosotros (as)* | *nos* | *nos* |
| you | *ustedes* | *los* | *se* |
| they | *ellos (as)* | *los* | *les* |

Subject pronouns may be omitted, except in the polite forms (*usted, ustedes*) of "you." *Tú* (sing.) and *ustedes* (plur.) are used when talking to close friends, relatives, children, and among young people; *usted* and the plural *ustedes* (often abbreviated to *Ud./Uds.*) are used in most other cases.

## *Verbs*

1. Spanish uses two important **auxiliary verbs**. Whereas *ser* can also be used alone, *haber* can only be used with another verb.

| **ser** (to be)* | **haber** (to have) |
|---|---|
| *yo soy* (I am) | *yo he* (I have) |
| *tú eres* (you are) | *tú has* (you have) |
| *usted es* (you are) | *usted ha* (you have) |
| *él/ella es* (he/she is) | *él/ella ha* (he/she has) |
| *nosotros (as) somos* (we are) | *nosotros (as) hemos* (we have) |
| *ustedes son* (you are) | *ustedes han* (you have) |
| *ellos/ellas son* (they are) | *ellos/ellas han* (they have) |

*Spanish has two verbs for "to be." *Ser* is used to describe a permanent condition. *Estar* is used to describe location or a temporary condition.

2. **Regular verbs:** There are three main categories of regular verbs:

| Infinitive: | ends in *-ar* | ends in *-er* | ends in *-ir* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **hablar** (to speak) | **comer** (to eat) | **partir** (to leave) |
| *yo* | *hablo* | *como* | *partos* |
| *tú* | *hablas* | *comes* | *partes* |
| *usted* | *habla* | *come* | *parte* |
| *él/ella* | *habla* | *come* | *parte* |
| *nosotros* | *hablamos* | *comemos* | *partimos* |
| *ustedes* | *hablan* | *comen* | *parten* |
| *ellos/ellas* | *hablan* | *comen* | *parten* |

3. **Irregular verbs:** As in many languages, exceptions have to be learned separately. The following are four common irregular verbs:

| Infinitive: | **poder** (to be able, can) | **ir** (to go) | **ver** (to see) | **conocer** (to know [a person]) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *yo* | *puedo* | *voy* | *veo* | *conozco* |
| *tú* | *puedes* | *vas* | *ves* | *conoces* |
| *usted* | *puede* | *va* | *ve* | *conoce* |
| *él/ella* | *puede* | *va* | *ve* | *conoce* |
| *nosotros* | *podemos* | *vamos* | *vemos* | *conocemos* |
| *ustedes* | *pueden* | *van* | *ven* | *conocen* |
| *ellos/ellas* | *pueden* | *van* | *ven* | *conocen* |

## *Negatives*

Form the negative by placing *no* before the verb.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Es difícil.* | It's difficult. |
| *No es difícil.* | It's not difficult. |

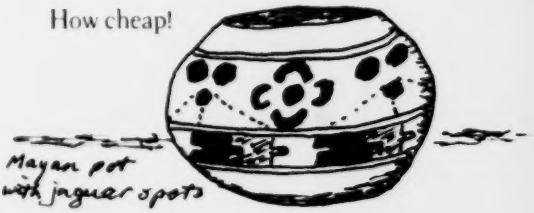
## *Questions*

Form questions by changing the intonation of your voice. The personal pronoun is often left out, both in affirmative sentences and in questions.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Hablo español.* | I speak Spanish. |
| *¿Hablas español?* | Do you speak Spanish? |

Note: Spanish uses a double question mark. The same is true of exclamation marks.

| | |
|---|---|
| *¡Qué barato!* | How cheap! |




## *Question words*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Who? | *¿Quién?* | (kyehn?) |
| Who? (plural) | *¿Quiénes?* | (KYEHN-nays?) |
| What? | *¿Qué?* | (kay?) |
| Why? | *¿Por qué?* | (pohr KAY?) |
| When? | *¿Cuándo?* | (KWAHN-doh?) |
| Where? | *¿Dónde?* | (DOHN-day?) |
| Where from? | *¿De dónde?* | (day DOHN-day?) |
| Where to? | *¿Adónde?* | (ah-DOHN-day?) |
| How? | *¿Cómo?* | (KOH-moh?) |
| How much? | *¿Cuánto?* | (KWAHN-toh?) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Who is speaking? | *¿Quién habla?* |
| Where are you going? | *¿Adónde vas?* |
| What's happening? (How's it going?) | *¿Qué pasa?* |

## *May/Can . . . ?*

| | |
|---|---|
| May I have . . . ? Can you give me . . . ? | *¿Puede darme . . . ?* |
| May we have . . . ? | *¿Puede darnos . . . ?* |
| Can you show me . . . ? | *¿Puede enseñarme . . . ?* |
| Can you tell me . . . ? | *¿Puede decirme . . . ?* |
| Can you help me, please? | *¿Puede ayudarme, por favor?* |

## *Wanting*

| | |
|---|---|
| I'd like .... | *Quisiera ....* |
| We'd like .... | *Quisiéramos ....* |
| Please give me .... | *Por favor, déme ....* |
| Please bring me .... | *Por favor, tráigame ....* |
| I'm hungry. | *Tengo hambre.* |
| I'm thirsty. | *Tengo sed.* |
| I'm tired. | *Estoy cansado(-a).* |
| I'm lost. | *Estoy perdido(-a).* |
| It's important. | *Es importante.* |
| It's urgent. | *Es urgente.* |
| Hurry up! | *¡Dése prisa!* |

## *It is/There is . . .*

| | |
|---|---|
| It is .... | *Es ....* |
| Is it . . .? | *¿Es . . .?* |
| It isn't .... | *No es ....* |
| There is/There are .... | *Hay ....* |
| Is there/Are there . . .? | *¿Hay . . .?* |
| There is no .... | *No hay ....* |
| There are no .... | *No hay ....* |

## *Prepositions and other words*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| behind | *detrás* | after | *después* |
| to | *a* | soon | *pronto* |
| for | *para* | already | *ya* |
| until | *hasta* | then | *entonces* |
| towards | *hacia* | again | *otra vez* |
| since | *desde* | there | *allí* |
| through | *por a través de* | here | *aquí* |
| at | *a* | inside | *dentro* |
| in | *en dentro* | outside | *fuera* |
| during | *durante* | down | *abajo* |
| with | *con* | up | *arriba* |
| without | *sin* | above | *encima* |
| before | *antes* | along | *a lo largo* |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| between | *entre* | perhaps | *quizá/tal vez* |
| on | *sobre/en* | not | *no* |
| under | *debajo* | nothing | *nada* |
| none | *ninguno* | nobody | *nadie* |
| and | *y* | now | *ahora* |
| or | *o* | immediately | *inmediatamente* |
| also | *también* | gladly | *con mucho gusto* |

## *Some common words*

| | |
|---|---|
| cheap/expensive | *barato/caro* |
| good/bad | *bueno/malo* |
| better/worse | *mejor/peor* |
| right/wrong | *correcto/equivocado* |
| light/heavy | *ligero/pesado* |
| easy/difficult | *fácil/difícil* |
| full/empty | *lleno/vacío* |
| vacant/occupied | *libre/ocupado* |
| open/shut | *abierto/cerrado* |
| old/young | *viejo/joven* |
| old/new | *viejo/nuevo* |
| big/small | *grande/pequeño* |
| quick/slow | *rápido/lento* |
| beautiful/ugly | *bonito/feo* |
| warm/cold | *caliente/frío* |
| never/always | *nunca/siempre* |
| early/late | *temprano/tarde* |
| near/far | *cerca/lejos* |
| left/right | *izquierdo/derecho* |
| yes/no | *sí/no* |

## *Quantities*

| | |
|---|---|
| a little/a lot | *un poco/mucho* |
| much/many | *mucho/muchos* |
| more than/less than | *más que/menos que* |
| enough/too | *bastante/demasiado* |
| some | *unos/unas* |
| any | *alguno/alguna* |

## Numbers

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *un, uno* | 20 | *veinte* |
| 2 | *dos* | 21 | *veinte y uno* |
| 3 | *tres* | 22 | *veinte y dos* |
| 4 | *cuatro* | 30 | *treinta* |
| 5 | *cinco* | 40 | *cuarenta* |
| 6 | *seis* | 50 | *cincuenta* |
| 7 | *siete* | 60 | *sesenta* |
| 8 | *ocho* | 70 | *setenta* |
| 9 | *nueve* | 80 | *ochenta* |
| 10 | *diez* | 90 | *noventa* |
| 11 | *once* | 100 | *cien* |
| 12 | *doce* | 101 | *ciento uno* |
| 13 | *trece* | 110 | *ciento diez* |
| 14 | *catorce* | 200 | *doscientos* |
| 15 | *quince* | 500 | *quinientos* |
| 16 | *dieciséis* | 700 | *setecientos* |
| 17 | *diecisiete* | 900 | *novecientos* |
| 18 | *dieciocho* | 1,000 | *mil* |
| 19 | *diecinueve* | 2,000 | *dos mil* |
| | | 1,000,000 | *un millón* |

## Time Words

What time is it? *¿Que hora es?*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| hour | *hora* | year | *año* |
| day | *día* | yesterday | *ayer* |
| week | *semana* | today | *hoy* |
| month | *mes* | tomorrow | *mañana* |
| Sunday | *domingo* | Thursday | *jueves* |
| Monday | *lunes* | Friday | *viernes* |
| Tuesday | *martes* | Saturday | *sábado* |
| Wednesday | *miércoles* | | |
| January | *enero* | July | *julio* |
| February | *febrero* | August | *agosto* |
| March | *marzo* | September | *septiembre* |
| April | *abril* | October | *octubre* |
| May | *mayo* | November | *noviembre* |
| June | *junio* | December | *diciembre* |

## 4.3 Some Useful Spanish Expressions

### *Greetings*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Good morning | *Buenos días* | BWEHN-nohs DEE-ahs |
| Good afternoon | *Buenas tardes* | BWEHN-nahs TAHR-days |
| Good evening<br>Good night | *Buenas noches* | BWEHN-nahs NOH-chays |

Note: In Spanish, "buenas noches" is used both when arriving and when leaving, roughly after 6 PM.

### *Approaching someone*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Excuse me, | *Perdone,* | pehr-DOH-nay |
| • sir | • *señor* | • sehn-YOHR |
| • ma'am | • *señora* | • sehn-YOH-rah |
| • miss/ms. | • *señorita* | • sehn-yoh-REE-tah |

Do you speak English? *¿Habla usted inglés?*
AH-blah OOS-TEHD een-GLAYS?

Do you understand English? *¿Comprende inglés?*
kohm-PREHN-day een-GLAYS?

Yes/No. *Sí/no.*
see/noh

I'm sorry. *Lo siento.*
loh SYEHN-toh

I don't speak Spanish. *No hablo español.*
noh AH-bloh ehs-pahn-YOHL

I don't understand. *No comprendo.*
noh kom-PREHN-doh

| | |
|---|---|
| I understand a little. | *Comprendo un poco.*<br>kom-PREHN-doh oon POH-koh |
| I speak very little Spanish. | *Hablo muy poco español.*<br>AH-bloh MOO-ee POH-koh ehs-pahn-YOHL |
| Please speak slowly. | *Hable despacio, por favor.*<br>AH-blay dehs-PAH-syoh, pohr fah-BOHR |
| Please repeat. | *Repita, por favor.*<br>rray-PEE-tah, pohr fah-BOHR |
| Thank you. | *Gracias.*<br>GRAH-syahs |

## *Asking for help*

| | |
|---|---|
| Excuse me. | *Permítame.*<br>pehr-MEE-tah-may |
| May I ask a question? | *Una pregunta, por favor.*<br>OO-nah pray-GOON-tah, pohr fah-BOHR |
| Could you please help me? | *¿Podría ayudarme?*<br>poh-DREE-ah ah-yoo-DAHR-may? |

## *Identifying yourself*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I'm a tourist.<br>We're tourists. | *Soy turista.*<br>*Somos turistas.* | soy too-REES-tah<br>SOH-mos to- REES-tas |
| I'm not from here. | *No soy de aquí.* | noh soy day ah-KEE |
| I'm from the U.S. | *Soy de los Estados Unidos.* | soy day los ehs-TAH-dohs OO-NEE-dohs |
| I'm from . . . | *Soy de . . .* | soy day |
| • New York | • *Nueva York* | • NWAY-bay yohrk |
| • Philadelphia | • *Filadelfia* | • fee-lah-DEHL-fyah |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Chicago | • *Chicago* | • chee-KAH-goh |
| • California | • *California* | • kah-lee-FOHR-nya |
| I'm North American. | *Soy norte-americano (-a).** | soy NOHR-tay-ah-meh-ree-KAHN-oh (-ah) |
| We're North Americans. | *Somos norte-americanos (-as)**. | SOH-mohs NOHR-tay-ah-meh-ree-KAHN-ohs (-ahs) |

* *Note:* In Spanish, with few exceptions, most nouns and adjectives end in *-o* for male speakers, *-a* for females, with the corresponding plurals: *-os, -as.* Use *-os* when including both males and females.

## *Politeness/courtesy*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Please. | *Por favor.* | pohr fah-BOHR |
| Thank you. | *Gracias.* | GRAH-syahs |
| You're welcome. | *De nada.* | day NAH-dah |
| Sorry (excuse me). | *Disculpe.* | des-KOOL-pay |
| Excuse me. | *Con permiso.* | kohn pehr-MEE-soh |
| Good appetite. | *Provecho./ Buen provecho.* | proh-BAY-choh/ BWEHN proh-BAY-choh |
| It doesn't matter. | *No importa.* | Noh ihm-POHR-tah |

## *Leave-taking*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| See you soon. | *Hasta pronto.* | AHS-tah PROHN-toh |
| So long. | *Hasta luego.* | AHS-tah LWEH-goh |
| See you later. | *Hasta la vista.* | AHS-tah lah BEE-stah |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| See you later. | *Hasta más tarde.* | ahs-tah mahs TAHR-day |
| See you tomorrow. | *Hasta mañana.* | ahs-tah mahn-YAH-nah |
| Good-bye/Bye. | *Adiós.* | ah-DYOHS |

Note: When passing in the street, Mexican friends say, "*Adiós*," "Goodbye" instead of "Hello" if they do not intend to stop and speak.

## 4.4 Some Typically Mexican Expressions

Mexican Spanish is rich in special expressions and vocabulary, sometimes unknown in other regions where Spanish is spoken. This will give you a start. You may wish to add others to this list:

| | |
|---|---|
| *ahorita/'orita* | right away; but really meaning: in a few moments |
| *¡ándale!/¡órale!* | go ahead; move; you have my permission! |
| *se me antoja* | I feel in the mood for . . . . (usually refers to a craving for food) |
| *¡aquas!* | watch out! (literally: Waters!) |
| *botana* | snacks; usually at a restaurant, bar, or a party |
| *¡qué bronca!* | what a mess/problem/pain! |
| *¡qué bruto!* | how dumb! |
| *me cae bien/mal* | I like it/I don't like it |
| *camión* | public bus; "camión de carga" is for a truck |
| *chamaco (-a)* | boy/girl |
| *¡chispas!* | expression of surprise |
| *me choca* | it disturbs me/it bothers me |

| | |
|---|---|
| *un chorro de* | a whole lot of . . . (literally: a flood of) |
| *chulo (-a)* | cute |
| *con permiso* | excuse me (literally, with permission) |
| *cuate* | friend |
| *escuincle* | young kid (from the Nahautl "*escuintle*") |
| *fuchi* | disgusting, unpleasant |
| *¡qué gacho!* | how ugly, how awful! |
| *güero (-a)* | blond, fair or light-skinned (person) |
| *¡hípole!* | expression of surprise |
| *¿mande (ud.)?* | excuse me, what did you say? (a common and polite expression) |
| *menso (-a)* | dumb |
| *mordida* | a bribe offered in addition to or instead of a fine; "*multa*" is the fine |
| *naco (-a)* | low class, ignorant |
| *necio (-a)* | stupid, dumb |
| *¡qué onda!*<br>*estar en onda* | what a great "ambience"! / to be "with it" |
| *¡qué padre!* | great, wonderful! |
| *rajarse* | to back out on something, as in "se rajó" |
| *tecolote* | used to refer to police (literally: owl) |
| *torta* | a sandwich in a roll;<br>"*sanwich*" refers to a sandwich on loaf bread |

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Dr. Alvino E. Fantini and Beatríz Céspedes de Fantini ran the Experiment language and culture camp in Mexico for many years. This gave them a wonderful opportunity to explore Mexico and make hundreds of close Mexican friends. Started in the 1930s, The Experiment is one of the oldest and most successful student exchange programs in the world.

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